By NILKAN PERUMAL

RAJAJI

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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PREFACE

Man's interest in good people with brains is always growing. And that accounts for my attempt at writing a biography of not the roaring savage with the sabre scar on his cheek, but the quiet fellow whose personality appeals with peculiar force to our national instincts and who carries the banner of civilization and whose life teaches us the marvellous power of a dominant purpose and of steadfast fidelity to an ideal.

Carlyle said once that the biographies of men of genius formed the saddest chapter in the great volume of human experience, not excepting the Newgate Calendar. He spoke of the privations and contumelies, which are too often the lot of the artist, but a quite different meaning is readable into the words. There are passages in the lives of the most consummate and exquisite artists—Sterne, Voltaire, Shelley, de Musset, and many others, including Carlyle himself—from which we turn wounded, asking where the common qualities of goodness may be found, since men of powers so infinitely superior to our own are so destitute of them.

But the biography of Rajaji ought to be a most inspiring subject of study for every alumnus of an Indian college, nay for every educated Indian. The necessity of

feeding and developing the mind ought to stand on the foremost plan of each independently thinking man and woman. There is a saying: "Tell me with whom you associate and I will tell you who you are." Thus I say: "Tell me what you read, and I will tell you who you are." Our reading will either lead us on to the broadway of vulgarity and commonplaceness, or to that of refinement and development of all the higher qualities men and women, who aim at the highest standard in life, are able to develop.

But in selecting Rajaji as a fit subject for biography, I have chosen a man who is cast in the mould of those rigorous and resourceful men who are bent upon ushering in a new era when ugliness will be no more, when the world will present a less disgusting spectacle than it does now. But at the same time be it noted that I have done my best to present Rajaji to you as he appears to those among whom he acts, and moves and suffers. Like Chateaubriand have I endeavoured "conscientiously to depict his personality, neither taking from him what is his nor adding that which does not belong to him."

The story of a rich public career like his, for over a period of forty years, should have been recorded by any one who knows him at very close quarters. In fact, his life would cover several bulky volumes, if tackled by a proper authoritative writer. As Rajaji himself has stated, somewhere, "well-documented biographies are what

are wanted". I agree with him in that but then, I must confess I could get no help whatsoever from any one to write such a *well-documented volume* of the kind that I have in mind. I know, even Rajaji himself would not spare me the necessary time to be of some help in a mission of that kind, if ever I approached him. Not that Rajaji does not understand the value of a biography to the nation. He is all too busy, otherwise. In his valuable *Foreword* to that fine biography* of Mian Fazl-i-Husain by his son Azim Husain, Rajaji remarks as follows:—

> "Any one who is in possession of the precious material required for a biography of any of our great men owes a duty to give it to the nation."

Well, it is only in that spirit that I have undertaken to write this small volume. "One who attempted a biography of Rajaji would have no simple task........." said Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, Madras' Food Minister, a close friend. It is true.

As I have already stated, if some other writer had done this work, I would not have in the least come forward to face it. It is only because I do not want some facts about him to lose their freshness with the passage of time that I have become bold to record them in a timely volume such as this. I wish to make it plain here that this is in no sense an *authorized biography*.

* Messrs. Longmans Green & Co. (Publishers)

PREFACE

This is not a work like the familiar type of biographies of national heroes that we come across aplenty, wherein all praise and no criticism is recorded. I have presented Rajaji to the reader in a *black and white* sketch. I look upon him and his career as objectively as possible. All the same, I happened to be an admirer, I must confess, just an admirer, who at the same time, is not blind to some of his shortcomings in politics. In brief, I have done this work without any bias and it is a very difficult job for any Author to do, especially when he tackles the life of a living person. To what extent I have succeeded in this, it is for my reader to judge.

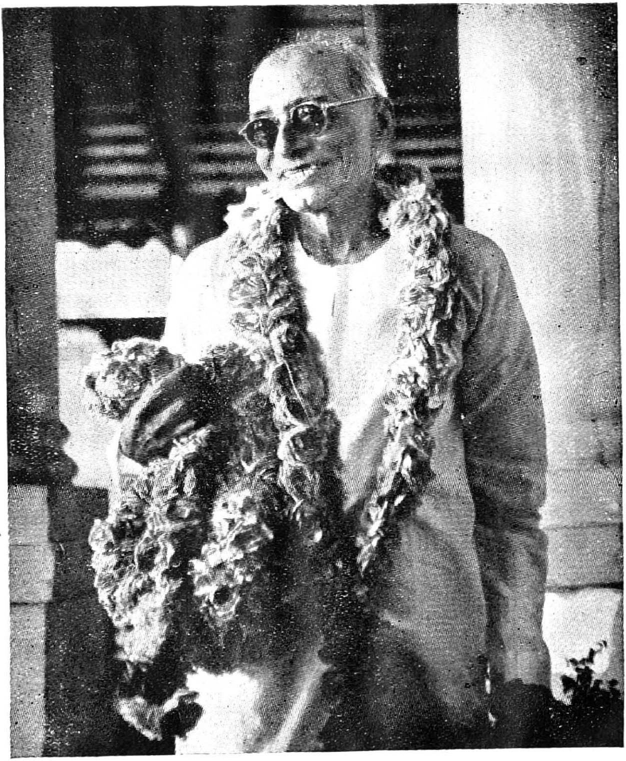
I have purposely kept my narrative to the absolutely necessary limit, because the plan of this work is only to introduce Rajaji in *Outlines* and I wish to be forgiven for the shortcomings, which are bound to be in all biographical works. Again, I reiterate that I would never have jumped on to do this tremendously difficult job of writing about one of the greatest and at the same time baffling type of politicians of our times, if only some other man who is closer to Rajaji had stolen a march over me.

My genuine thanks are due to that brilliant writer in Tamil and English, Mr. K. Chandrasekharan for his valuable suggestions and to my friend Mr. N. Bulchandani for his sustained interest in my writing this book.

Calcutta, N. P.

May 8, 1948.

C. R. I



"...nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice."
—*Shakespeare*

RAJAJI

A FIRST GLIMPSE

I

To Western Bengal, a new Province which is but a few months old as a separate entity, has come its first Indian Governor, a Vaishnavaite Brahmin from South India. He answers to the name of Chakravarti Rajagopalachariar. He is referred to by friends and foes alike either as "C.R." or "Rajaji" and the abbreviations are popular throughout the country.

Those of us who spent most of our times away from the mother-country and caught occasional glimpses of Rajaji and his political activities from the columns of tradition maintaining Indian newspapers never for a moment thought that he would one day become the Premier of his own Province or the Governor of another and yet, later the first Indian to act as Governor-General and have a temporary tenancy in the Government House, New Delhi. We could only understand him in those days as an ascetic type of politician akin to Gandhiji, a preacher of the Non-violence creed, believing in the success of a political cause through prayer and passive resistance. That we were mistaken, it is to be now admitted. And the miracle that has happened now was perhaps in the making in those

days! Indeed, the twist which destiny gives to men sometimes astounds even carefully calculating minds.

The drama of life which Rajaji has been playing is not a show in one act but a grand cabaret performance with a thousand exciting scenes included in it, almost changing the colour from hour to hour. It is an eminently superior drama worth understanding. Still, to study it all and interpret faithfully to the readers of my land who mostly want stern and serious stuff, statistics and quotations, is no easy task. However, I prefer to tell a straight story, in brevity, none of the essentials missed.

To friends conversant with the plan of this book I said that I could write of everyone in the Congress Organization to-day with ease but not of Rajaji. He baffles every student. He is some one like the late Sir Basil Zaharoff*, a man in mystery to many! He is the one man in South India who never had a moment of leisure during the past thirty years. All the time he has been speaking, writing and working. To study through all his work and achievements alone during the last forty years, it would take a long time for any systematic author. And without a complete study, no one could pretend to understand him even in a meagre degree.

The son of a Vaishnavite Brahmin land-owner breaks through the traditions of his family by going to a school

*A Greek Financier who lived in England surrounded in great mystery.

to master the language of an alien race ruling his country. His imagination is fired to achieve success in life and accomplish great ideals. Then having spent many years in English educational institutions, he turns up as a lawyer to match wits with the most talkative and brainy men at the Bar in his native district of Salem. He interests himself in Civic affairs, breaks religious traditions by appointing *Pariahs* to operate the public water taps in the streets inhabited by the high-born among the Hindus. He receives rebuffs but triumphs over all that. He stands firm. He does a lot of good to the town of which he becomes the first citizen. Then after the first world war, he throws himself fully into an agitation for self-government vigorously launched by Mahatma Gandhi. He goes to prison, suffers indignities, sacrifices a lucrative practice at the Bar. Then for the sake of his honest convictions in politics, he quietly retires to a retreat in Salem situated amidst corn fields and poor's hamlets, spends the time spinning and preaching prohibition schemes with the ideals of a Pussyfoot Johnson. He is in touch with all the political events in the country but he himself is not actively connected with them now. Then, when the appropriate time comes, he re-enters the struggle for Swaraj in the Salt Satyagraha days. He is condemned to prison life once again. He is released. Then he finds the Congress policy as one of Constitutional agitation and not a warfare without gun powder, as it has been all these years according to

Gandhian schemes. A general election under the new reforms of Provincial Autonomy comes. He contests a seat from the constituency of the Madras University which gave him a law degree. Gets elected triumphantly. Becomes the leader of the victorious Congress Party, in the legislature. Negotiates terms with the King's Representative in Madras on conditions under which he would accept office. Then, after many meaningless manoeuvres he finally takes responsibility on his shoulders and forms a Cabinet, himself becoming the Prime Minister. For twenty-seven months he runs the Administration of his Province and resigns when the Congress Working Committee directed the Provincial Premiers to do so. Imprisoned once again. Out, he wants a *way out* of political deadlocks by recognising *Pakistan.* Censured by the Congress, he resigns. Due to *cliques* and intrigues he is not allowed to become Premier of Madras once again in 1946 but he bides his own time until he is included in the Interim Government the Congress formed in September 1946. Then the Governorship of Bengal with the arrival of Indian freedom on August 15. All these have been in brief the many political adventures which adorn the admirable career of Rajaji on whom all eyes in Bengal are set to-day.

Some say that Rajaji is the one Indian preferred to remain in the laps of the Gods. But he feels it otherwise. Meanwhile, we admire him. The day of judgment for him

in his present gubernatorial office is still far off. But let us hope that he will finally be creditably acquitted by the future editor of India's *Dictionary of National Biography*, for all his actions in his political career.

Rajaji has no parallel in our present political history. And I wonder whether we had any even in the past. It is certainly too much to hope that there would be some one in future too! He stands in a class all by itself. A typical son of the magic East, he strangely enough knows the intricate ways of the western Diplomats—a Hitler, a Lloyd George, a Col. House—though he has never crossed the seas to a foreign soil, not even once for the sake of at least sampling the pleasures of a sea voyage. But apart from his diplomacy, what prevents him becoming a perfect statesman of the type we know them in the modern world is his proverbial love for that pale, stunted, grimmy, work-worn, ill-clad, poorly-nourished and poverty-stricken individual known as the "Peasant" whose simplicity of life and sincerity of purpose are so dear to him! With him, Rajaji forgets everybody else. The result is that he stands with the peasant and the peasant with him. All others stare at him quite astonished. They fail to understand this *Archangel* who has come into the whirlpool of politics only because he was saturated with the beautiful ideal of service for the sons and daughters of India. We are estimated not by the high ideals that we hold or the eloquence that we display or the talent that

we possess but by the service that we render to our fellow-men.

If any one is misunderstood most in India to-day, it is Rajaji. Uncharitable remarks have been made against him from time to time. A great many misconceptions prevail regarding him, the fate of vigorous, forceful personalities. He was assailed for wearing dark glasses! They say that he wears them because he does not want any one to look into his eyes! Still, he looks into the eyes of every one else keenly, they comment. But the simple truth is that he has defective eyes from his youthful days. He is not to be blamed for it. It is nature's unkindness, not his, nor mine, nor yours! Then they say that he is a tactician in mental calibre equalled only by that faint historical figure of ancient recollection, *Chanakya.* Even this is a merciless reflection on this able man. For, Rajaji has no private purpose to be tactical. He has no crude selfish anchorage in things or possessions. Nor is he out to parade any personal vanity. He has no ambitions to amass fortunes or fly a flag of power with the instincts of a Bismark. He is too humble for all that. Fame he has got. Fortune he had seen in early life. But political power he has now acquired. What of it? He would make use of it in the best interests of the people from whose midst he arose. He is actuated with the loftiest motives in the field of public service. He sometimes errs in his actions. But who does not? Still, he is

shrewd enough to correct himself in time. An intimate study of his career would tell you the truth of it.

Rajaji did not spring up as a surprise in Indian politics. He was not invested with the honours of leadership as an idle prize. Years of hard work coupled with concrete results achieved have elevated him to the status of one of the *great* among living Indians. To-day he is a master but he has been a servant long enough to be a master. As a staunch believer in the *Karma* theory, to him everything is *Karma.* He is a true *Karma* yogin, doing his duty to the best of his ability, expecting no returns *personally.* If returns there are, he accepts them! Even that is *Karma.* Nothing else!

Some pamphlets written in Tamil years ago described him as Hitler-like in his actions. But the patriot laughed loudly at such an analogy. "Hitler would laugh" too if he heard about his supposed parallel, he said. But Rajaji has no pretensions to be modest here when compared to the late German Dictator. "Hitler is not a tyrant" he once thundered. "He is exercising the power of liberty of the people who returned the legislators, who in turn had elected him leader". Even so, Rajaji perhaps wanted his critics to know, as Madras Premier, that he was elected leader by the Congress legislators who were in turn elected by the liberty of the people!

Rajaji is a modest person *personally.* Hunters of biographical material relating to his personal life are sure

to meet with a blank refusal from his lips. "I think our ancestors were wise in not indulging in biography . . . ." he used to say. Yet, we know Indians from time immemorial indulged in nothing but biographies. What are books like Ramayana, Mahabharata and the like but good religious biographies?

Those who are after recording his good deeds as a politician are fortunate, if they are clever. They get what they want, though he himself may not be advertising them. Clever politician that he is, Rajaji has always been to the outside world the modest of men. The more modest he chose to be, the better he became the target of publicity hounds. He knew the secret only too well. But he never let any one know that he knew it. To-day, like a practical politician of the day, he understands the myriad uses of advertisements as much as he should know. For that reason he never tried to break the cameras of inquisitive photographers trying to get a "shot" of him anywhere. He is not at all wrong in obliging news-hawks and camera-clickers this way. He is merely keeping up with the march of time. Imagine him standing on a platform addressing a mass meeting in a Salem hamlet in 1938 and moaning the absence of motion picture cameramen to record the effects of his wonder scheme of Prohibition enforcement! Again, in the occasional tea-parties that he gave as Governor of West Bengal, we even saw his ADCs moving about with a camera!

In brilliancy of conversation, no other man of my acquaintance can approach him. The picturesque phraseology, the glancing, gleaming flashes of wit, the originality of thought and word and the deep under-lying current of humour fascinate the listener to the point of hypnosis. The customary smiling expression of his face belied by the coloured-spectacles that mask his eyes completely puzzles you as to whether, or when, he is speaking seriously. When he finally gets launched on a subject, he handles it in the same fashion a fox-terrier plays with a bone—he harries, he worries it; tosses it up in the air, and catches it deftly on the rebound; gnaws it and tears it at the end into such minute pieces that not the faintest suspicion of the original idea remains.

As a politician Rajaji is *modern*, I would say, *especially modern.* He moved with the times and always adjusted himself according to the hour. When Non-cooperation was the cry in the land, he cried Gandhian slogans and stood firm to the ideals propounded by the Mahatma. When Chittaranjan Das counselled Council-entry as the correct method, Rajaji cut himself aloof knowing that it would be waste of time for Congressmen to graze in the pastures of legislative councils. So he reaffirmed his faith as a *No-changer* and took to khadder work and no-drink campaigns. Then the Civil Disobedience affair was a matter of mere obedience to the Congress mandate. Later, knowing that even the India Act

could provide chances to do ameliorative work for the people and that there could be nothing more for a modern politician than the office of Premier, he at the psychological moment worked himself up to gather power into his hands. But such an ambitious scheme was conceived for no fulfilment of any selfish purpose, to be sure. He would use his power in the service of his people, now that the shrewd white Ruling race had led their dependent Oriental nation into the paths of self-government. Even his severest critics have entertained no doubts about Rajaji's motives in public affairs. They know them only too well. But they only disagree on points of policy and the course of his actions. His critics and he alike aim at only one goal—the welfare of the country. But when the route to reach it differs, they unkindly doubt the man himself!

YOUTHFUL DAYS

II

Soft rain fell like sprays of rose water in a ceremonious Hindu gathering as I entered the Thorapalli village near Hosur in the Salem district one day a decade ago. This is a fairly large village having about fifteen hundred homes inhabited by nearly ten thousand souls. They are Brahmins, Goundans and Chetties by caste denominations. They speak Telugu and Tamil, even Canarese, because Hosur is quite close to the borderline of the State of Mysore. With its ancient temples, quaint cut wells, clean bathing tanks, and red-soiled streets, it is a picturesque village. Here I was pointed out to a plot of land filled with the debris of an ancient home which had it stood to-day would have become a monument of curiosity and importance. But years ago it was a red-tiled home with an attractive verandah in the front. It was the home of a remarkable Vaishnavite Brahmin Mr. Chakravarti Iyengar. He was a land-owner possessing about fifty acres of dry and wet lands. In Hosur they had good rains each year but if per chance rains failed, then the villagers resorted to water supply from private wells and tanks. Chakravarti Iyengar's lands gave him a fairly good yield and with that he maintained his family. He was a

married man and his wife went by the name of Singarammal. She was a pious woman and with all that, was best in South India's Brahmin womanhood.

Though Chakravarti Iyengar was primarily a landowner and cultivator he was also the chief man in Hosur. He held the office of village Munsiff and was in charge of the Government agricultural stock depot. For that, he received a small remuneration.

A heavy built man with a round face and a broad fore-head smeared with white and red caste-mark pastes, Chakravarti Iyengar was a scholar whose authority in Sanskrit literature was of a high order. His family as a whole was as such. His cousins had been attached to the Royal Court of Mysore in the role of Pundits. Chakravarti Iyengar himself could recite the *Ramayana* of Valmiki fully from sheer memory. He would often hold devotional gatherings in his village and shed the light of his learning to the benefit of his fellow folk. At times scholars from other parts of South India came to Hosur to consult important questions in Sanskrit literature. Prof. Oppoert, a German who was for a time Professor of Sanskrit in the Presidency College, Madras, was a frequent visitor.

When Lord Connemara was the Governor of Madras he once visited Hosur. Having heard about the brilliant Chakravarti Iyengar, he sent for him. An interview was arranged. An interpreter put the Governor and the Pundit

into free communication of ideas between them. His Lordship left well impressed with the remarkable scholarship of the man at the conclusion of the talk. Such was the high esteem in which he was held by one and all.

Chakravarti Iyengar's life was blessed with homely harmony. To him and Singarammal three sons were born. The first was Narasimhachari, the second Srinivasa Iyengar. The third was Rajagopalachari, the man to make the family's name great in South India. He was born in December, 1879 to be exact. The boy was brought up with especial affection by the parents for the reason that he was the *youngest* among the children. He was not of a serious type in childhood. He was playful. He used to play ball in the streets with other boys but at home he was of a reserved sort, making an impression on the parents. Something of effort, of restraint, of moral courage and of the hourly meeting of sharp circumstances was stamped on his arresting physiognomy. Chakravarti Iyengar fondly called him "Iyengar" and Rajagopalachari used to respond with all respect and regard. At home, the members of the family conversed in Canarese and Tamil as occasions arose.

Rajaji was put to school in his fifth year after preliminary training at home. He proved to be an industrious student, prudent and anxious to learn. His school lessons interested him. All books attracted him. If he came across the prospectus of an insurance company

he would want to know what it was all about. His was an inquiring mind from childhood days. The father was of a teaching type. He satisfied the curiosities of his promising son with apt answers and exhaustive explanations. At times when Chakravarti Iyengar had other problems engaging the mind, he would put aside his son's querries for another opportunity to answer. But the lad understood the father so well that he never got irritated when an inquiry of his was postponed for answer. He patiently waited for another hour to get the explanation.

Chakravarti Iyengar brought up his children in no luxurious ways, though he could somewhat afford to do it. From the outset he wanted them to cultivate a taste for simplicity which he himself had. In spite of the rather cold weather of Hosur the boys were asked to sleep on grass mats, with of course thick blankets to cover. No bedsteads were provided. They had to study their lessons at night in the light obtained from the old style brass lamp, whose flame was fed by the oil extracted from laurel nuts. But food he gave them aplenty. Milk, ghee and fruits were in the menu besides rice, wheat-bread and sweets. Even a few nickels were given them as pocket money occasionally.

Chakravarti Iyengar's sons went schooling, Narasimhachari, Srinivasa Iyengar, Rajagopalachari, all. Hosur had an English school having up to the third standard

and there, the boys showed remarkable progress. But among them the brightest lad was Rajagopalachari. Even in those early days he showed a great love for books, as we have already observed. Whenever his father gave him a few anna pieces, he straightaway dashed forth to the village book-seller and purchased any work that interested him. In the class room he was attentive to the lessons but outside, he was cheerfully playful. Still he possessed a prodigious memory. After sun set each day he read his school lessons regularly for two or three hours in a studious manner before retiring to bed.

In his Hosur home Rajaji had his strange hobbies. He was very fond of cats and he used to play with the kittens in his leisure hours. He had also a love for cattle. Often he went round to the back yard of the home and patted the cows, calves and bulls in the pen, many of them Chakravarti Iyengar possessed. The family pony used for a coach was fondly looked after by him. These fine sentiments towards the animals was an inborn gift in him.

At the age of fourteen Chakravarti Iyengar sent him to Bangalore to continue his studies in a high school. On arriving in that city he stayed in a hotel and joined the Central Hindu College. There he had physics as his favourite subject because he was advised to study it by a Professor Cook, who taught it. He came across another distinguished professor in Mr. Tait who taught English

literature. Rajaji soon proved very proficient in the English language. Professor Tait, impressed by the brains of his young pupil soon developed a partial liking for him. They often spent some time conversing more as friends than as student and teacher. Mr. Tait was happily alive in Scotland even when Rajaji became the Premier of his Province, and he felt supremely happy on knowing the greatness Rajaji had achieved for himself in life. Tait died in 1945. But the pupil even today holds him in grateful memory. Sometime ago Rajaji said of him:

> "How can I forget Mr. Tait? It is not a mere figure of speech to say that he was a father to us all in our college days."

Tait once advised Rajaji to proceed to England and study at Oxford. But he was not enthusiastic about the suggestion. He politely declined saying that "India is quite enough for me".

Rajaji's days in Bangalore were eventful. Besides cultivating the acquaintance of men of learning like Tait and Cook he got popular with a large circle of friends, many of them well known in Mysore to-day. Even when young, he was popular with his associates. He had then no outer arrogance and vain presumptions which would have made him an object of detestation, instead he was distinguished by an amicably piquant temperament and this made him a universal favourite.

He was acclaimed as a model student in school. He scored enough marks in all subjects and shone well as a student of English literature. He mastered all Shakespearean works and ceaselessly read the novels of Walter Scott. Modern English games were not popular in India in those days and the seeds of them were in fact just being sown here. At any rate, Rajaji had no interest in them. But he went out for long walks in the evening, walking always in a thoughtful and serious mood. Sometimes, he had a friend or two to accompany him. But his constant companion in those days was Mr. Navaratna Rama Rau, a former civilian officer in Mysore. Having the ideal of simplicity before him he proved to be a thrifty student. The help he got from his father each month was just a small amount of money absolutely needed to cover his essential expenses. Besides paying the school fee and boarding charges, he invested little on clothing. He was content to have the barest articles of apparel necessary. He no doubt wore a *dhoti*, black coat and cap but that was all. Yet, he was absolutely clean as polished marble. The whole idea was simplicity, again simplicity, in clothes and mode of living.

Ten years ago, Rajaji speaking at his old college in Bangalore went into a reminiscent vein. "I think I have spent my happiest days in this college" he told a distinguished gathering present to hear him.

Then after a few years of study in Bangalore, he moved on to Madras for two years to study law. That brought his college days to an end.

LAWYER

III

At twenty Rajaji had become a lawyer ready to throw himself into the bread-winning struggle. Why he chose law for a career I am not able to definitely say. But I believe that he must have been attracted to it only because of the real spirit of the Bar. "The arduous struggle, the blows given and received, the exultation of victory, the sting of defeat, which are lawyers' daily experiences, far from breeding division and ill-will, only bind them more closely together by the ties of comradeship for which one would look in vain in any other arena of the ambitions and rivalries of men". More over, he could see the famous men of those days in South India had been invariably members of the legal profession. Old Chakravarti Ieyngar, himself a Government servant at Hosur wished his son to pass the Indian Civil Service examination and become a District Collector. But Rajaji had no flair for the glories of a Civilian's office. He would rather be an independent man with an independent income. He would not be a servant in an administration run by an alien race.

To begin his career at the Bar, Rajaji looked at Salem, the chief town in his native district. So he went

there. It was a wise decision, for he thought that he would build up a practice there first before "invading" Madras for legal eminence. To aim at a lucrative practice all at once in Madras itself would be a folly, he well realized. He also understood that the Madras lawyers who earned thousands a month got all their money through appeal cases sent to the city from the district centres. Giving due thought to these facts, Rajaji went away to Salem.

When he arrived in this town to commence practice, his aged father Chakravarti Iyengar and the brothers Narasimhachari and Srinivasa Iyengar too came to live with him. Mother Singarammal was no more alive, she having died in the meantime. Hiring a house in the Hasthampetai extension area in Salem, Rajaji commenced his work in courts. He looked up to no senior lawyer to initiate him in the profession. He started independently. Of course veterans of the Salem Bar like C. Vijayaraghavachariar were there and with them he picked up an acquaintance.

Pretty soon he became a 'star' lawyer in the criminal courts. On the civil side, he had few cases. He prepared wills and helped clients to take out letters of administration and so on. The Shervaroyan Hill planters on hearing about his abilities engaged him as their legal adviser. His fame soon spread. The landed aristocrats in Salem now sought his services and to him they entrusted all

court work. Then his part in a case connected with the Mittadar of Thiruchengode enhanced his already well established reputation in the legal circles.

With the steady rise of his fame as an efficient lawyer his fortunes too rose in proportions. With the increase of work he moved on to the second Agraharam street so that he might be nearer to the courts in Salem. His prosperity as a lawyer could be imagined when we come to know that even within two years of his going to Salem, he purchased a handsome horse-coach. Later, he was the first man to own a motor car in Salem, himself investing about three thousand rupees to purchase a French *Diarec* car. He dressed himself well. In those days he was clad in a *dhoti*, black alpaca coat, lace turban, socks and shoes to match.

Neither the fame as a sound lawyer nor the admirable monthly income he earned thereby ever made Rajaji self-satisfied. He continued to be a hard worker. From sun-rise to sun-set, he had before him legal work. Towards evening he used to go to the Salem Literary Society, an institution of which he is one of the founders. There he met his colleagues in the profession and exchanged views. But he was not extravagant with words. "He was somewhat a reserved sort of man in those days" said his brother Srinivasa Iyengar to me one day a few years ago as we sat talking in Thiruchengode.

Soon after he came to Salem, Chakravarti Iyengar insisted that Rajaji should be married. Messengers were sent out to look for a bride. But when willing fathers who had daughters to be married heard about the bridegroom as a bespectacled bachelor, their faces turned pale. They did not want their daughters to be given to any sight-defective man. However, a Vaishnavite Brahmin villager of Chittoor never worried about these silly considerations when approached and he readily agreed to get his daughter Shri Alamelu Mangammal married to the lawyer from Salem. That way, the marriage took place in 1899.

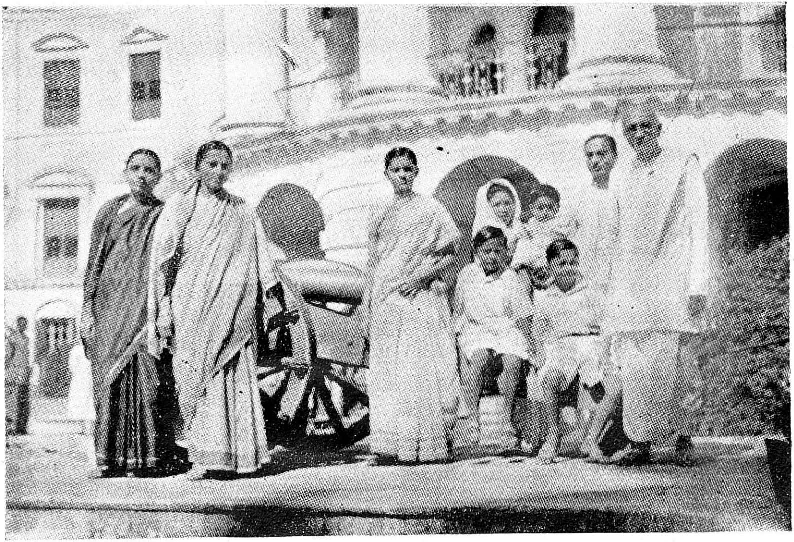
Alamelu Mangammal knew Tamil and Telugu well and was an intelligent young lady. She was a model of devotion to her husband. In return Rajaji showed great affection for his wife whom he tenderly looked after. Their life together was happy for a time. She gave birth to two daughters and three sons. As years went by she developed physical ills and became weak day after day. In 1917 her illness unhappily took a serious turn. Rajaji now left the *Aghraharam* and moved on to the Masonic Building in the Suramangalam area to reside. Able medical aid was given her. He spent sleepless nights nursing his ailing wife. He gave her effective medicines and helpful diet at hours prescribed by the physicians. He sat by her bed, offering words of consolation. In spite of all this care and devotion shown in nursing her, Alamelu Mangammal passed away. Till death

came, Rajaji was care-worn and worried. But when it finally did come, he faced the event courageously, for he knew well that there was nothing to worry about beyond the end. After eighteen years of married life happily spent he lost the comrade of comrades, the sharer of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, the fond and merry companion who was always a crown to her husband. But then his worry was about the five children now. Though one or two of them had attained boyhood, the rest were infants. That was the only care he had just then.

In Salem Rajaji made a mark as an important citizen. He developed new ideas in him and whenever he found that social reforms were opposed to the age-long Brahminic traditions, he was inclined to forget traditions and face facts. Chakravarti Iyengar, the father was of an old type. He did not like his son becoming a smasher of traditions with new ideas about men and matters but then he was not the man to interfere seriously. Rajaji had the greatest reverence for his Dad throughout but then he had his own strong, free will too. Soon we find him interested in social reform work and taking a liking to master the political affairs in the world. A few years after coming to Salem he was elected Chairman of the Municipality. In this office he discharged his duties so creditably that today, the Council Hall hangs a picture of his as a mark of gratitude for his good work.

Conscientious to duty, he attended the Municipal Office every day by eight of the clock in the morning, as though he was paid for the work! He also put to shape his ideals of equality of man in public while holding the office of Municipal Chairman. But in attempting to do that he encountered with many stout oppositions. For instance, he had *Pariah* workmen to open the Municipal water supply taps in the Brahmin inhabited streets. The high-caste folk vehemently protested. Let me here put the whole story as fell from his lips.

> "Less than 20 years ago there were two Panchama employees in the Municipality of Salem. Their work was to open and close the stop-cocks for the water taps in certain quarters. The Engineer of the Municipality transferred these two men in the ordinary course to the Agraharam ward. I was the Chairman of the Municipality, but I did not happen to know this when it happened;—not that if I had known it, I would have asked the Engineer not to do it. Then there was a great agitation in the Agraharam and all the Brahmins were angry with me. 'You are a Social Reformer, but you have no right as Chairman to force your views on us. You have put these Untouchable employees on to the Agraharam merely to



"A holy family, that make
Each meal a Supper of the Lord." —*Longfellow*

worry us. There are so many places where you could have put them.' I had numerous friends all over the Agraharam, all co-workers in various activities; and one of them said, 'My old mother is objecting to use the water. Help me.' Another said, 'My aunt has not bathed.' And a third, 'Do you wish to kill my grandmother? She has not eaten at all for two days.' All the widows cast looks of hatred at me as I passed along. I knew how they loathed the touch and contamination of an 'Untouchable.'

"Now it was lucky that the Mahatma had not promulgated his Satyagraha in those days. If they had known it then, they would have used it against me straightaway. They would have all gone on hunger-strike. They had a genuinely-felt grievance and would certainly have given up their food with ease and with a sense of complete martyrdom. What would have been my fate? Even the Government would have telegraphed to me to withdraw the 'Untouchable' from the Agraharam ward. Government would have told me, 'Your social reform is right but you do not know your people,' and would have ordered the transfer of the Untouchable stop-cock men over my head.

"Luckily, however, Satyagraha was not known to the good people of the Agraharam. So they did not go beyond verbal objections and moving propositions in the Council. They argued but I was obdurate and said, 'You may have your religion or whatever it may be in your private capacity. The Municipality cannot make distinctions of caste. I cannot displace them. Today you ask for tranferring them. If I transfer them to another ward, the people of that ward will also ask for a transfer of these Untouchable men. It is better that you bear with them.' They had no answer. They dared not suggest dismissal. After some time everything subsided. I too forgot all about it until some time later. During the Reforms enquiry, before the Parliamentary Joint Committee, it was said, 'There is no chance of Democracy progressing in India with its innumerable castes and distinctions.' Then the late Mr. K. T. Paul who was a Salem man and who was there said, 'One Municipal Chairman, a Brahmin, did succeed in fighting caste ditinction in his Municipality. India is changed.' When I was told

> of this I was reminded of the affair and when the Brahmin friends of Salem who had objected to the employment of the Untouchable men heard of the Joint Committee reference they too were glad and thought it was rather good I had been obstinate."

Secondly, we see him, at this stage, giving scholarships to Untouchable students. But the school authorities refused to admit those boys. Rajaji insisted and finally got them in safely. Such noble attempts he has made even in years when crusades against Untouchability were unknown in India. They clearly mark out the man for his far-reaching ideals of social equality and large-heartedness.

For two years Rajaji was the Municipal Chairman and his good work during that period stands out as a matter of merit even today. Commenting on the Municipality's administration report in those days, Mr. E. W. Leigh, the then Collector of Salem wrote that he wished all the Municipalities in the Province were maintained as that of Salem. For Mr. Leigh's judgment, I pay the highest regard because, I chanced to know him in Madras during his last years. After retiring from the I.C.S., he did missionary work and was in charge of the Church of Scotland Mission in Madras. We often met in his bungalow in Ritherden Road. When Rajaji became Premier, Mr. Leigh was happily alive in Madras.

This energetic lawyer who found himself in a net work of activities in Salem soon became a victim to that dreadful disease Asthma. It troubled him often. It troubles him no more today! He was his own physician to cure it, he once said. During the first World War years, he was once seriously taken ill. One early morning he set out on a trip to Coimbatore to attend to legal work. He rode up to the rail road station in his Diarec coach-model motor car. With him was Mr. Narasimha Iyengar, his junior counsel. They had the hood of the car folded up and the chill weather badly affected Rajaji. During the train journey he felt feverish and returned to Salem from a mid-way station. The doctors diagnosed *pneumonia.* For several weeks he was forced down to the bed. Efficient medical aid was summoned. Even then, the doctor gave up hope. But Rajaji had the will to live. He changed his doctor immediately and was soon on the road to recovery. He got well pretty soon and was restored to normal health once again.

Courage is yet another commendable quality in this veteran lawyer, admired by the people of Salem. When at the top of his legal career, he one day came out of the Court and boarded his horse-coach. The driver was just then away. But as soon as Rajaji got in, the spirited horse took to his heels. The animal ran at a terriffic speed. People who were nearby shouted out at Rajaji asking him to get down but he would not. "I will see where all he

goes'' he retorted and stuck to his seat inside. After running to a length of six furlongs the coach struck a stone by the side of a river and stopped. Rajaji calmly got out as if nothing had happened and gently patted the animal. The terror-stricken spectators of this incident admired him for the remarkable boldness he exhibited.

A similar incident occurred years later. He had an abscess to be removed from his thumb. It was stated to be rather *serious*. His doctor advised him that only under chloroform, could he operate. Rajaji did not agree. Finally, the operation went on without chloroform, and the patient courageously stood up to the painful ordeal for over an hour remarkably well, to the admiration of all.

Besides social reform work Rajaji took an intelligent interest in politics during his sojourn in Salem. At the Literary Society he used to play tennis in the evenings and then sit on a bench in the lawn to discuss current politics with his friends. He read the newspapers and digested the day's news with care. He had a keen eye on foreign news too and thus, he studied the happenings in the world abroad. He then heard about the Passive Resistance Movement which Gandhiji was leading in South Africa. He was wonder-struck by the Movement. Now Rajaji, admiring Gandhiji even in those days, collected funds in Salem and sent him. Later on, when Madame Besant roused the Indians to fight for their Home Rule rights more ardently, Rajaji sympathised with her and lent his support.

AT MADRAS

IV

Rajaji was visiting Madras from time to time all along. But in 1919 he came away to the City for good, leaving his children to the care of his brother Srinivasa Iyengar. He commenced practice at the Bar in the City. Himself 'one of the select few to make money as a leader of the Bar' in Salem, Rajaji began to thrive even in Madras. Very soon, he built up a reasonable popularity in the country for himself even here.

One day he went over to see a friend, who was once a lawyer but in later life had taken to the newspaper publishing business. He was Mr. S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, the famous Proprietor and Editor of the newspaper *Hindu*. When Rajaji went to meet him at his residence, a thin tall figure attired in the costume of a *Banya* with a gigantic white turban was introduced to him. "Mr. M. K. Gandhi" the name was mentioned. Rajaji was happy at the event, for he admired the Gujerati lawyer even years ago when he figured as the leader of the Passive Resistance movement in Pretoria to keep the world balanced and sane, inspite of all the mad freaks put forward by others with distorted outlook. They had a heart to heart talk before they parted that day. Mahatmaji should

have perhaps thrown his charms on Rajaji who went away with greater admiration for the great leader who had risen above self, and petty aims and low ambitions.

Later, when the Non-co-operation Movement came, Rajaji threw himself into the campaign head over heels. He now swore that he would not enter the courts any more to make money. He also pulled out his two sons now in college, according to the boycott of schools programme launched by Gandhiji. He had of course a fairly good amount of money with him now earned at Salem and later in Madras. But then the question of money for the future did not worry him in the least. He now decided upon a full time career of public work for the rest of his life. And so he came into active politics. As Dr. P. Subbaroyan, one of his earliest friends told me, "in 1920, C. R. did nothing but political work, personally sacrificing much". Though he belonged to the militant Tilak school of politics, he adjusted himself to serve well in a passive Movement under Mahatma Gandhi that was to change the base of human life, making love instead of fear the motive of human action, resting all government upon persuasion and consent, rather than upon force, and thus creating a new ideal for human endeavour.

No one could serve the people well, unless one knew them at close quarters. And to know them well, he had to travel, he thought. With that idea he toured throughout South India very often and I doubt whether any one had seen as much of the South Indian people as Rajaji.

He spoke at several meetings and preached Gandhian doctrines in an eloquent manner. Then in 1922 Mahatmaji was arrested and sent to prison. Rajaji was summoned to Northern India just then to be in charge of the editing work for *Young India*, Mahatmaji's weekly publication. Often he came south from Ahmedabad and took with him Gandhiji's youngest son Devadas who, a few years later fell in love with Rajaji's daughter Lakshmi and married her. Devadas and he conducted vigorous campaign tours in South India on behalf of the Gandhi Movement.

In 1922 there arose differences among Congressmen on the use of legislatures. Practical politicians like Chittaranjan Das wanted the Congressmen to capture Councils and work. To this view he found support in Madras Congressmen like Kasturiranga Iyengar, Srinivasa Iyengar and Rangaswamy Iyengar. But Rajaji doubted the wisdom of the new move. He would stand firm with his chief Gandhi. Work among the masses would be productive of better results than work within the legislatures, he thought. This was because he knew well the limitations under which Councillors had to labour in the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms years, the certifying powers of the Viceroy and Governors always thinly figuring before their eyes. With Gandhiji in prison the cyclonic campaigns of Chittaranjan soon gained momentum. The Congress at Gaya decided in favour of Council-entry. Rajaji shrugged his shoulders. He did not know what to do. But a few

months later he saw Gandhiji out of prison. They conferred together on the new situation that had arisen within the Congress circles. Yes, Gandhiji and he would do Congress work of a different kind while leaving constructive minded men to thunder within the legislatures, a "measure of experimenting with nothing" as the *No-changers* put it. But in 1925, when Chittaranjan died all of a sudden, the lure for Council work became less among Congressmen.

Meanwhile, Gandhiji and Rajaji had organised the All-India Spinners Association. Allied to it was the *Khadi* Board. So they would now work together to popularize the cult of the spinning wheel. Rajaji at this juncture left Madras for Salem. He established an *Ashram* or retreat for himself to work in a quiet way the new ideals made popular by Gandhiji. To help him in his schemes the Zamindar of Pudupalayam (a place near Thiruchengode) offered three and a half acres of land amidst a vast plain of corn fields. There were one or two brick-built sheds already in existence but Rajaji constructed a few more. Here he stocked cotton, spinning wheels. He collected the poor people from nearby villages, presented them with spinning wheels and cotton and asked them to produce threads. If they turned out good counts, he paid them well for their labour. This way, Rajaji infused a fresh enthusiasm to spin among the villagers around him. He preached to them ideals of a clean life and attempted to elevate their scale of life. He

wrote innumerable pamphlets on the drink evil both in Tamil and English and conducted a "no-drink" campaign in the villages of Salem with a view to crush the hydra of drunkenness. He also edited a Tamil journal *Vimochanam*, meaning 'salvation' solely with a view to reform the toddy-mad villagers of his native district. As a good psychologist he preached his prohibition doctrines like a story-teller, employing a very simple language both in speech and writing. As I write these lines, a few of the pamphlets he published in those days in colourful form lie before me. They strike me of the enormous capacity of Rajaji to carry on a campaign and his ability for organization. What amount of research work he should have put in to collect statistics to support his convictions against alcohol consumption in those pamphlets! What great patience he should have had to write them out! The man's remarkable zeal for reforming humanity is amply revealed by these little brochures on Prohibition. More evidence will be superfluous.

Rajaji's *Ashram* at Pudupalayam became a model village reconstruction work centre. When I visited it towards the close of the year 1936, I was amazed to see the good work turned out here by a band of spirited young-men trained for public service by none other than Rajaji. Mr. Narayan Rau, the courteous Manager, showed me round the whole place. There was a *Khadder* depot where many fine specimens of Indian cloth were stocked. A dis-

pensary giving medical relief to about fifty villagers each day was in existence, left in charge of a man with alopathic medical qualifications. Even surgical operations under chloroform were performed by him at times in the dispensary where there was a dozen beds provided for those who want to remain in for treatment. This small hospital did a great service to the otherwise helpless villagers in the Pudupalayam area. Here in this *Ashram* no one thinks of caste restrictions and in fact a vigorous propaganda against 'untouchability' has been carried on throughout. Besides all these, the *Ashram* maintained about six free schools for the children of villagers. All these have been possible only because of the dynamic energy of Rajaji.

The inmates of the *Ashram* guided by Rajaji boldly launched a Prohibition campaign in 1929. The Government agreed to experiment with the scheme within the Thiruchengode Taluk. For a few months the great leader was restless in order to make the experiment a success. But he was not fully successful. He was only able to touch the surface of the conscience of the people on the drink problem. Meanwhile the officials of the Excise Department continued to file up cases after cases relating to the violation of Prohibition rules. On that count, Government pronounced judgment opining no such novel method would ever have a chance of successful working. To-day,

the experiment is being worked out once again but with greater success.

From 1925 to 1929 Rajaji was quite busy with the work carried on in his Pudupalayam *Ashram*. He continued to identify himself with every phase of political work nevertheless. But the fact was that he had more interest in village reconstruction work in those years than in actual political activities. Whether it was an agitation to boycott the visit of the Simon Commission or a campaign to break salt laws, whatever the Congress decided Rajaji followed. Whenever a new move was made in the Congress policy he scientifically analysed the beginning and the end of it. If he found a policy unsound, he ventured to persuade his colleagues to reconsider it. In case he failed in the attempt, then he left the matter there itself believing that the temper of time was against him. He would then expect the softening influence of time to set matters aright. But he never forgot his argument. He would wait for a fresh opportunity to drive his point of view into the mind of his colleagues. In the meantime if the majority of Congressmen had called for action, Rajaji readily submitted to the orders. Whether he fully believed in the utility of a Salt Satyagraha campaign or not I have my own doubts. Still he was in it. To him it was a duty to do everything that the Congress and Gandhiji decided. In 1929 he was arrested by the Government. Within the

next three years he was in prison twice, convicted for civil disobedience activities.

Within the prison walls, Rajaji was not alone. He had a number of other Congress political prisoners too. With them he kept a close touch always. In no time he turned the prison into a sort of school. Rajaji himself became a *Don*. He discussed important subjects each day with his fellow prisoners and lectured on a variety of themes. Astronomy, Botany, religion, politics, dignity of labour, national finances, all these questions were clearly explained by him to those around. These 'chats' reveal him as a scholar of admirable mental calibre. Besides, he kept a personal diary, recording his activities and feelings during his internment days. All these have been published in booklet form and published for good purpose. They make interesting reading.

Rajaji was the supreme leader in charge of the Civil Disobedience Movement in South India in 1929. In that role, when negotiations commenced towards the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, he often met Sir George Stanley, the then Governor of Madras to discuss matters as far as the Southern province was concerned. These meetings eventually resulted in a personal friendship between the Governor and the political leader. Even after the Salt Satyagraha days Rajaji often visited Sir George for personal talks.

In 1934 when all the Round Table Conferences and Joint Parliamentary meetings were over, the Congress decided upon a new policy. They wanted to win the elections in the country. So when a general election took place that year to the Central Legislative Assembly, Rajaji strained every nerve of his to see that not a single Congress candidate ever lost in South India. For days together he toured the province from end to end, spoke to millions of voters and secured their support for the Congress Party. The result was a remarkable election victory. "We owe this great election success to none else than C.R." said Mr. T. Prakasam, the Minister of Revenue in the Rajaji's Cabinet and recently Prime Minister, shortly after the Assembly elections, acknowledging Rajaji's services in grateful terms.

The effects of a number of years' brain work together with physical strain now affected this warrior for the country's cause. So in 1935 he told a Madras audience that he wished to retire from active politics. But South India could not afford to lose the services of a man of the type of Rajaji whose organizing capacity marvelled even the leaders of any *Shirt-Movement* in Europe. Without him Congress affairs would receive a setback every one felt. And it was so. As such, his friends prevailed upon him to continue his leadership and not quit the tumultuous Congress camp. Now the veteran patriot reconsidered his decision. He would rather risk his health than the

Congress cause. So he put aside any thought of retirement just then.

Towards the end of 1936 he all of a sudden announced his retirement from the Congress. That came about under strange circumstances. His friend Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, a Congressman himself had disobeyed a decision of the Tamilnad Provincial Congress Committee and set up a candidate at his own free will to contest the Trichinopoly Municipal Council chairmanship election. The officially set up Congress candidate was sorely defeated. The action of Rajan was considered by the All-India Congress Committee and he was censured for breach of party discipline. The conduct of his friend from Trichy worried Rajaji. He could not understand now which way the wind was blowing within the Congress camp in the south. The only thing he could do was to himself leave the Congress, he decided. So he did.

Again, requests from friends to reconsider the decision were forthcoming. South Indian Congressmen could afford to see Rajan away but not Rajaji, they said. This time the leader was a bit obstinate. He was not the man to be easily moved to respond to the wishes of his friends. Finally, even here, Rajaji decided to re-enter politics only because he had the interest of the Congress cause foremost at heart. And I have it on the authority of Dr. P. Subbaroyan that it was Mr. K. Srinivasan, the Editor-Proprietor of the *Hindu* who was successful in persistently per-

suading Rajaji to come to that decision. Once he came back, he continued to play his part actively and creditably as ever.

In 1936 Congressmen were busy preparing their plans of action for the future. In the following April, Autonomy would be given to the Provinces. For that, a general election had to come. In that the Congress had plans to secure the majority of seats. In this connection, the central organization of the Congress Party was busy selecting candidates throughout India. Rajaji was asked to look after affairs as far as South India was concerned. It was no easy task. In addition to choosing candidates he wanted the fair name of Madras as a stronghold of Congressmen to be maintained. For that, he had to work in a terrible manner. With his remarkable turn for organization Rajaji once again took to vigorous touring, addressed gatherings and got himself assured that a triumphant victory was certain. When the elections came, the Congress candidates swept the polls. Out of four million voters, more than two-thirds had voted "Congress".

Rajaji himself was a candidate for election. His constituency should have been Salem in the ordinary course. But why he left that in preference to the University seat I am not able to know clearly. Perhaps he wanted to be in the Legislative Assembly as a representative of the English educated section of his countrymen. That way, there could be no room for any criticism that he, like so many was

elected by the majority of the Province's voters who understood nothing much about the intricacies of modern politics or legislation.

After the elections the Congress legislators met in Madras and chose Rajaji as their Party leader. In that capacity he was invited by Lord Erskine, the Governor to form a ministry but he declined. It was because the Supreme Council of the Congress Party did not want acceptance of office unless the Provincial Governors gave an undertaking that they would not interfere with the work of the Ministry in any case and use their special reserve powers. Rajaji too somehow became obsessed by that theory. As for Lord Erskine he made it plain that it was not in his power to give any such undertaking even if he so desired personally. Twice Rajaji went to the Government House for negotiations on the question. In the end he declined to form the Ministry. But apart from the question of forming the Ministry he paid a tribute to the courtesy shown him by the Governor. Said he:

> "I owe it to His Excellency to say that our conversations were throughout marked by utmost courtesy and friendliness on his part and the break-off is due not to any lack of patience or of personal goodwill."

On April 1, Provincial Autonomy was inaugurated in all the Provinces of India. As in the other Provinces

where the Congress majority party declined to accept office, so in Madras a Ministry which would command the confidence of the newly elected legislature was not possible. However, to have no Ministry would mean a deadlock. But then there were men willing to form a Ministry without in the least considering any political principles. Now Rajaji having declined to form the Ministry, the late Sir K. V. Reddy, a politician without a party at that time, formed a provisional Ministry to carry on the "King's Government", as he explained!

Now Rajaji was not inactive. Embittered, he turned to the electorate of the Province and took the Congress leaders from spot to spot to tell the people how unprincipled politicians were the men who formed the Provisional Ministry. He denounced K. V. Reddy and his friends as "worth only eight annas in the rupee" as Ministers. The knighted politician himself was not silent. He threw counter attacks at the doors of Congressmen and defended himself like a stag at bay. The whole position was ugly beyond description. Only in Madras such despicable political situations are apt to arise, said many wiseacres in the realm of politics. The Congress refused office on a mere bubble issue and its opponents who all along anxiously awaited to snatch the crumbs of Ministerial office, now conveniently got a real chance. So they got into the Ministry through the back doors.

Finally, the Congress decided that if the Party leader in each province could personally satisfy himself that the Governor would not freely use his special powers, office could be accepted. Rajaji a member of the Congress High Council, was most responsible for such a wise decision it is said. Being a level-headed politician he clearly saw that no purpose would be served by creating a deadlock. Having got a majority the only sane course for the Congress to adopt was to accept office and serve the people to any extent possible under the new Government of India Act. Rajaji himself once admitted that the Act in fact provided room to carry on ameliorative measures in the interests of the masses. Then, why not seize the opportunity and go ahead? That was his idea.

Then on July 14 K. V. Reddy and his colleagues walked out of the Ministry through the same door which admitted them in April. Their achievement came to nothing. Their ideal of carrying on the "King's Government" was all tall talk and timely excuse. Their reward was a rather bad time receiving torrents of abuses from the people for fifteen weeks!

Now Rajaji the leader of the victorious majority party stepped in to form the Cabinet. He retained the *portfolios* of Law and Order and Finance into his hands and distributed other items to nine of his colleagues, all ardent Congressmen and political convicts except Subbaroyan and Munisami Pillai. Regarding his selection of Ministers

Rajaji said that he had "given to the people . . . . a good set of workers in the cabinet". As far as the representation of various communities and interests were concerned, there is no doubt the selection was good. Rajaji described his Ministerial colleagues as worth "Sixteen and a half annas in the rupee"! He rejoiced himself that he had become Premier on the support of an electorate which had voted with a blind-herd feeling for the Congress. On assuming office he issued a Press statement in the course of which he said that he had been "literally flooded with messages of affection and good wishes from all over the Province". But then he was a bit nervous too when he thought of the odd responsibility now placed on his delicate shoulders. Said he:

> "I tremble as I think on the one hand of the great hopes that have been raised among the people and on the other of the limitations of my capacity."

Yes, he knew the office of Premier was a cumbersome affair. Still, he who had achieved much, which few Indians have achieved, would not turn down the crown of Prime Ministership. He would in that office do his best and leave the rest to the tune of destiny. All the same, he was not too bold while accepting this new responsibility. Worried of course, he now did the one inevitable thing which most Indians would invariably do at times of mental uneasiness. He turned towards God begging for

the grant of the "boon that he may prove worthy of the trust and affection so generously showered on him by the people". With these prayers he assumed office as Premier on July 14, 1937.

THE PREMIER

V

Whether Rajaji was successful in office as Prime Minister of Madras from July, 1937 to October, 1939 is a matter of sheer individual opinion. He has a reputation that his was one of the best Congress Ministries if not the best of that time in India. That was ten years ago. The man was of course clever and he had the genius of a gifted administrator but of his administration itself there are two opinions.

Rajaji, on his part, had known administration since for a few years he was the Municipal *Boss* of his town in Salem. It was alright with a town, but when it was the question of administering a Province, it was of course a different task. On the whole, in his role as an administrator, he proved to be a very gifted man but his administration, I mean the legislations and reforms that he introduced, during his twenty-seven months of office as Premier did not receive entire support from the people of Madras.

Still, Rajaji had more admirers than critics of his Premiership. He captured the imagination of writers and politicians all over India and abroad. Sir Reginald Coupland has recorded that "by common consent an outstanding figure was Mr. Rajagopalachari, Premier of

Madras. His Ministry and the Bombay and U. P. Ministries were the best." I wish I could quote more such encomiums but I have not seen many more. "My own view is that my Premiership in Madras was in fact as well as in public estimation, very bright and successful." Rajaji himself once told a friend but take it from me, he is honest in such a belief. No man who lacked self-esteem ever succeeded in life and Rajaji is a great success, it need be hardly stated here.

If books had been written assessing the worth of the first Congress Ministry under Rajaji's Premiership in Madras by any one, I feel, I would have no hesitation in quoting extensively but no such work exists, to the best of my knowledge. There is however a Congress Party publication reviewing the first year's work of the Ministry, a mere pamphlet which is ill-written and unintelligible and therefore unworthy of anything to be taken for quotation. As such, I am compelled to quote here, in all fairness to Rajaji, some of his own expressions, taken at random from a lengthy speech of his, delivered in the Madras Legislative Assembly in October 1939. He said:

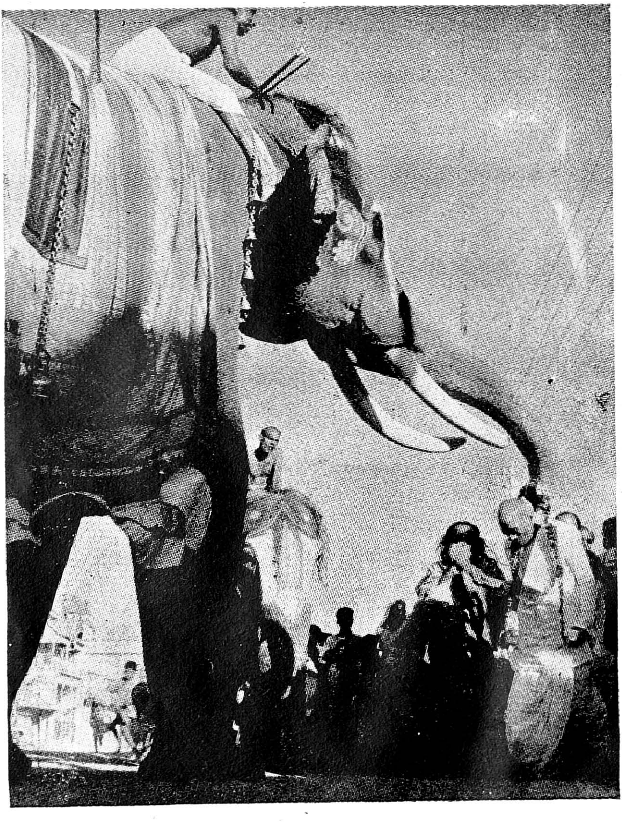
> "In the actual administration of the Province during the last 2½ years, this Government has done very many good things which have pleased the people. But we had to and we have done things which have displeased some people very badly. I do not deny it.

They are very good people. To-day some orthodox men are fasting. The same men do not fast for too long. They fast in series, each one for a convenient length of time. It shows that they feel strongly about it. I cannot say that they are doing anything improper. We have done things which have displeased some people very badly. They think it is a matter of life and death—a matter of soul even more than of life and death. We have displeased many others, not so as to hurt the soul, but touched their pockets—a more serious affair than the affair of the soul in some respects. We have touched many people's pockets. So that, it is not with a nine days' wonder that we went to the polls in the recent elections.* We did not go to the polls with sweet declarations, with nice phrases and with six months' fraudulent practice to please this man and that man. 2½ years of solid work which must involve a number of realities, good, bad and indifferent . . . ."

He went on:

"We still think that we are doing good and we value those things greatly. Some of them are more important than any constitu-

* Madras Municipal elections, 1938.



"I am monarch of all I survey."

—*Cowper*

tion, let me say that straightaway. We are doing a number of things that are really the hard substance of progress, better than mere words, phrases and constitutions. They are all very good things we have been doing and we have still to do. In spite of the difference of opinion of the Opposition, they have been very helpful and on the whole they have never really obstructed; they have only opposed and they have not been bad opponents. They have been helping us and have enabled us to get through. We have succeeded and we can still succeed."

Rajaji had an *elephantine* majority in the legislature composed of Congressmen who were committed to discipline and who were not free to ask questions about the action of their Premier. Therefore, Rajaji carried on his Premiership with that strength and he did what he felt was his duty, without the least consideration how some of his ideas came into conflict with the feelings of the general masses in the whole province.

For that reason, it could not be said that Rajaji was all too successful as Prime Minister of Madras but I emphasise even here, individual opinions vary. He held office only for twenty-seven months resigning in October 1939 on the issue that India was not consulted by Lord Linlithgow in his declaration of war in the name of India

against Hitlerite Germany. And these twenty-seven months, of his Premiership were more a crown of thorns than a bed of roses to him, I am sure.

The Rajaji Ministry passed a *Debt Relief Act* by which the indebted peasants of South India were to be given relief but to what extent they had relief, was a matter of controversy. They introduced Prohibition in some of the districts and for the loss of revenue arising from that, a public loan was floated to fill the coffers of the Government to carry out ameliorative schemes such as the Papanasam Power Project. A Temple Entry Bill was introduced but it was a sort of visionary measure. Though the Congress pledge given at election time said that Congressmen in office would reduce land revenue and general taxation, the Rajaji Ministry actually increased taxation in many spheres. When the Sales Tax was introduced, the whole business community in the province protested in a chorus. A tax on Indian manufactured mill-cloth was also enforced. The Ministry also introduced compulsory study of the Hindi language in primary classes, thereby giving rise to a *satyagraha* campaign from ardent Tamil lovers (Rajaji himself is one for that matter!) and as many as three thousand people were jailed on this score. "When Premier of Madras, Mr. Rajagopalachari caused widespread disaffection in the South by proposing to make Hindi compulsory in schools" testified the *Statesman* in an editorial in November last!

"This anti-Hindi controversy is not a fight between Hindi and Tamil but between Liberalism and narrow-mindedness" he explained in a single sentence!

He added that:

"Nothing is going to shake us from this proposal."

Congressmen who always condemned the use of the Criminal Law Amendment Act by the British Government to enforce law and order in India said nothing when the Rajaji Ministry freely used the provisions of this Act. All anti-Congress elements in India like Mr. Jinnah, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, Dr. Khare, vigorously protested against the use of this particular Act to suppress agitation against compulsory Hindi in Madras schools but Gandhiji was there to his rescue alright! He wrote in Harijan:

"I see from Rajaji's public declarations that the *Act* contains a few sections which suits the new situation that the Congress is facing. If such is the case, Rajaji will be foolish if he does not make use of them."

"Blood is thicker than water" commented several critics of Rajaji on seeing Gandhiji's defence. This way, the legislations introduced by the Congress Ministry during Rajaji's Prime Ministership received all-round protests from many quarters but he banked strongly upon his great party majority in the legislature and *pooh-poohed* all opposition.

He said:

> "If a small number of people wanted to prevent a popular government put in by a vast majority of the people from carrying out its legitimate duties, then that government could use any provision of the law or any other weapon available to carry out such duties."

When Rajaji went on propaganda tours he had a rough time of it all in many places. Particularly, the Andhras suspected that he was against the coming of the Andhra Province, as though the British were ready to give it to them then! In July 1938 when he went on a tour of the Andhra districts he was heckled at Vizagapatam at an Andhra students' meeting. His speech was interrupted by jeers and cat-calls. The Premier asked them:

> "I find that many of you, if not all of you, do not agree with me."

The students shouted out:

> "Yes, all of us."
>
> "I am very pleased to hear that all of you disagree with me. If all of you do not trust me, then good-bye!"

He left them there and went away.

After twenty-seven months of administration, on October 26, the Madras Legislature met and passed the following anti-war resolution, the Premier himself moving it.

"This Assembly regrets that the British Government have made India a participant in the war between Great Britain and Germany without the consent of the people of India and have further in complete disregard of Indian opinion passed laws and adopted measures curtailing the powers and activities of the Provincial Governments. This Assembly recommends to the Government to convey to the Government of India and through them to the British Government that in consonance with the avowed aims of the present war, it is essential in order to secure the co-operation of the Indian people that the principles of democracy be applied to India and her policy be guided by her people, and that India should be regarded as an independent nation entitled to frame her own constitution, and further that suitable action should be taken in so far as it is possible in the immediate present to give effect to that principle in regard to the present governance of India including arrangements whereby all war measures in this province may be undertaken with the consent of and executed through the Provincial Government. This Assembly profoundly regrets that the situation in India has not been rightly

> understood by His Majesty's Government when authorizing the statement that has been made on their behalf in regard to India."

On this occasion Rajaji made one of the longest speeches he ever did in the Legislature. It was a very able exposition of India's attitude towards the war, and in one place he defined the Congress attitude thus, even quoting an analogy from Shakespeare:

> "In this connection I am sorry I am inclined to tell you a story. It is very wrong to tell stories on such serious occasions. But the story which I would like to tell you is from Shakespeare, the story of King Lear. Lear wanted to divide his realm among his daughters. The eldest daughter said, "I love you more than words can wield the matter, dearer than eye sight, space and liberty." King Lear was pleased and said 'Take away those large tracts'. Then the next girl said she loved him even more than that and the father gave her also an ample share. The third daughter said 'I love you as I should, nor more nor less. I cannot give away all my love to you. I have to keep a portion for my good husband; I cannot give it to my father all, if I am to marry'. Poor King Lear got angry, he was a fool before he became mad,

> and the rest of the story is known to hon'ble members. This story is told by one of the greatest of the world's poets who comes from England, and this is why I am inclined to tell that story. It is not a mere story. It is truth imbedded in a story. Who can forget the lesson after reading that greatest of the plays of the greatest of poets? It is not flattery that will help any one. The Congress cannot give all its love to Britain. It must reserve that which is India's own due."

The Assembly passed the resolution and adjourned *sine die.* The Congress Ministry then went out of office. Rajaji, later on read an anti-war slogan in public, was arrested and sentenced to a few months imprisonment. The trial Magistrate, a Muslim in Madras, quoted even verses from the *Bhagawad Gita* besides showering words of praise on Rajaji, while passing a *token* sentence. Well, he himself during the incarceration in the Trichy jail conducted classes for his studious fellow-prisoners on the essence of the *Gita*!

PARTING OF WAYS

VI

When Rajaji came out of the jail in 1941, he found the political situation in the country surcharged with great enthusiasm. War-effort was in full-swing and the voice of those who cried hoarse against co-operation was but heard in a feeble manner. Clever, as ever, Rajaji wanted a new approach to the whole problem. He did not think that the British should quit India then, leaving this country to the mercies of the aggressive Japs, threatening encroachment upon our soil any moment. The Gandhian Congress at that time coined a new anti-British war cry "Quit India", which Rajaji detested.

Meanwhile, the British Government chose an eminent Peace-maker in Socialist Sir Stafford Cripps to go over to India in March 1942 to effect a compromise with Congress-men in India. But the Cripps Mission was misunderstood as a sign of growing weakness on the part of the British by some of our politicians and indeed, even Mahatma Gandhi was one that way. He characterised the Cripps Proposals as a "post-dated cheque on a crashing bank"! Rajaji thought of it differently. In his admirable little book the *Way Out**, Rajaji recorded the Cripps proposals as a

*Published by Oxford University Press.

"bonafide gesture by the British Government to the people of India and not a measure of mere expediency or appeasement".

However, the Cripps Plan eventually failed, as we all know it and Sir Stafford left India in April, after straining all his nerves good intentionally for nearly a month. According to Sir Reginald Coupland, Rajaji was willing to agree to it as against Gandhiji, provided some satisfactory compromise was arrived at on the all-important question of national defence. Indeed, Rajaji's swan-song throughout the next two or three years had been, it was stated, "Back to Cripps".

Rajaji conceived of yet a new strategy on behalf of the Congress after Cripps left. He proposed that by accepting the principle of Pakistan a compromise should be brought about with the Muslim League and both the League and the Congress should form a National Government to safeguard the interest of India in war times. This is briefly known as the famous "C. R. formula".

Rajaji finally called in a meeting of the Madras Congress Legislature party in May 1942 and moved a resolution as follows:

> "It is absolutely and urgently necessary in the best interests of the country at this hour of peril to do all that the Congress can do to remove every obstacle in the way of the estab-

lishment of a national administration to face the present situation; and therefore in as much as the Muslim League has insisted on the recognition of the right of separation of certain areas from United India upon the ascertainment of the wishes of the people of such areas as a condition precedent for a united national action at this moment of grave national danger, this party is of the opinion and recommends to the All-India Congress Committee that to sacrifice the chances of the formation of a National Government at this grave crisis for the doubtful advantage of maintaining a controversy over the unity of India is a most unwise policy and that it has become necessary to choose the lesser evil and acknowledge the Muslim League claim for separation should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing the constitution of India and thereby remove all doubts and fears in this regard, and to invite the Muslim League for consultation for the purpose of arriving at an agreement and securing the installation of a National Government to meet the present emergency."

This resolution was defeated, almost all his followers throwing the leader overboard!

He later on moved a resolution at the Congress Working Committee meeting at Allahabad on the same basis but it was defeated by 120 votes to 15. On the other hand, the Working Committee passed a strong counter-resolution emphasising the *Unity of India*! Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad stoutly opposed his move and the resolution was defeated. By August the same year, all the Congress leaders were jailed on account of the Civil Disobedience Movement but Rajaji remained outside, carrying on propaganda in favour of a compromise with the Muslim League and the formation of a National Government in India. The Muslim League never took Rajaji's views with any seriousness and although in provinces like Orissa and Assam, Provincial Autonomy was allowed to return, having such men as the Maharaja of Parlakimidi and Sir Mahamad Saadullah as Premiers, Rajaji's move for a National Government in war time was not considered favourably. But he carried on his campaign without wavering throughout for many months.

When Mahatma Gandhi came out of prison on May 6, 1944, he persuaded him to meet Mr. Jinnah and they met at last on August 9, on the basis of the "C. R. Formula" which conceded the principle of Pakistan. Even here, Mr. Jinnah stood by his own terms, the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting finally breaking down without any good results on August 27. Rajaji then retired to Madras to devote his time for writing Tamil books and he is the author of several

good short-stories and essays which are very popular in his Province.

Rajaji was the one most important Congress leader who was not imprisoned in 1942. That was because he had resigned from the Working Committee on the defeat of his resolution on accepting the principle of Pakistan. A South Indian anti-Congress weekly publication, the *Sunday Observer* commenting on these topics then editorially wrote that it was a clever tactics of Rajaji to have remained outside to look after Congress matters, while the other top leaders were behind the Bars. In so many words, the paper expressed that sort of a sentiment. This was imputing motives, and not fair criticism, opined some. However, Rajaji who was rather hurt by such remarks, filed a suit against the paper for libel. The suit lasted before a Madras magistrate for more than a year and Mr. Mudaliar, the Editor of the paper, who conducted his own case cleverly, even without the aid of a lawyer, put many inconvenient and inescapable questions to Rajaji when he was in the witness box. That apart, when the Magistrate gave his judgment, it was a conviction for the Editor in a fine of Rs. 1,000/-, I think. That judgment was torn to shreds by a High Court Judge later on, when the *Observer's* editor preferred an appeal against conviction.

The loss of the libel suit by Rajaji was a rather sad affair to us all. We felt that he should never have gone to

court on the score of those editorial remarks in a weekly paper. Said Prince Von Bulow:

> "A politician should have a miraculous skin, thick as an elephant's which cannot feel a fairly large insect and therefore, does not react to it and get as sensitive as a mimosa which closes at the slightest touch."

Rajaji could have been a bit charitable in this. But then, he like all Congressmen, was so infauated with his self-righteousness, that he could simply brook no sharp criticism from any. On a previous occasion, the editor of a Tamil magazine had apologized to him in court, for making certain ill-natured reflections in his journal. That was alright. But the *Observer* affair was totally different. At the same time, I have heard it from many sources that Rajaji was extremely sensitive to any criticism against him. I cannot vouchsafe for the truth of any such assertion. If it is so, Rajaji should have by now ceased to exist, for, no Congress leader of the first rank was the target of more severe criticism than he, but he has stood up to them all through the aid of his superior insight and superior culture.

However, I know he does not spare his critics, rather easily. He hits back, where he can. A distinguished Madras journalist some years ago had written an admirable book of pen-sketches. He was not all too praise for

Rajaji in it and he had censured him in parts. A copy was sent to the great leader. A reply was received, pencil-scribbled on an used-envelope! "You have wasted your time writing on me", Rajaji wrote there.

'CLIQUES'

VII

In December 1945 a general election for choosing members to the Legislative Assembly in Delhi was held in India. Soon after, came the Provincial elections. At this time the question on the lips of every Madrasi was whether Rajaji would again be taking office as Premier. Some thought he would, others were pessimistic. However, internal intrigues within South India's Congress Party ranks had grown up to a very distressing degree that we saw a sharp clique against Rajaji's continued leadership of the Congress in the South. It was actually a sort of nasty crisis within the Congress dove-cot in Tamilnad. The reason was adduced by various participants in the tangle in various ways.

Kamaraja Nadar, the President of the Tamilnad Provincial Congress Committee who had a big say in deciding whether Rajaji should be Premier or not was reported to be hostile. I made careful inquiries about it and I learnt that Nadar, a genuine Congressman had violently disagreed with Rajaji's "appeasement" policies towards the League in 1942 and that was the prime reason for him to knock off the plank before Rajaji to ascend the pedestal of Prime Ministership. Rajaji's resignation from

the Congress Working Committee in 1942 and his aloofness from courting imprisonment in the Civil Disobedience Movement the same year had angered Nadar and his followers, we were told. However, I had left Madras long before these events had developed and therefore, had no opportunity to study affairs at close quarters. Therefore, letters from friends were the only source of information.

In January 1946 Gandhiji was touring Bengal saying that he had "neglected" this Province too long without a visit and so, had to make amends but then, he must have been considerably worried to know at the same time that there was trouble brewing in the Congress ranks in Madras. Then it was also given out that Gandhiji was going over to Madras to preside over the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Hindi Prachar Sabha and well that might have been so! He suddenly left Calcutta for Madras and we don't know what happened with regard to his attempts to patch up the differences between Nadar and Rajaji's followers. However, no settlement of the dispute was in sight when Gandhiji left Madras for Wardha. Gandhiji then wrote in his *Harijan* on February 9 as follows, supporting Rajaji's case for Congress leadership.

> "I would be less than loyal to the Congress organization if I did not warn them (the people of Tamilnad) against losing the valuable services which no one can shoulder as Rajaji can at the present moment."

Gandhiji added on that Rajaji was one of his oldest friends and was known to be the best exponent in word and deed of all that Gandhiji stood for. Then he spoke of the 1942 differences he had with the South Indian leader in the following words:

> "That in 1942 he differed from me, I know. All honour for the boldness with which he publicly avowed the difference. He is a great social reformer, never afraid to act according to his belief. His political wisdom and integrity are beyond question. I was, therefore, pained to find a *clique* against him. It is a clique that evidently counts in the official Congress in Madras. But the masses are devoted to Rajaji. I am neither vain nor foolish enough to feel that I could have had the huge public demonstrations all along the route of the pilgrimage, if he had no influence with the masses in Tamilnad.............."

The usage of the word *clique* by Gandhiji angered Kamaraja Nadar to which Gandhiji again replied saying that "if I am wrong in the use of the word *clique* or in my estimate of Rajaji, no one need follow me"! Meanwhile, Rajaji himself wrote a letter to Gandhiji on February 21 to Poona asking Gandhiji's permission to leave the political scene altogether.

Wrote Rajaji:

> "What you said about me publicly has, like the churning of the ocean, brought up all the poison and you have to swallow it like Rudra. I know you can. But it has made my old longing for peace too strong to resist. I haven't the strength to stand it any longer."

All said and done, Rajaji stuck to his guns and left his Madras University Constituency alone without contesting it. Mr. Prakasam, the *Andhra leader*, was later elected Prime Minister. The Andhras were adamant that none but one of their own men should be Premier that time. To such a view, the anti-Rajaji elements in the Tamilnad Congress organization lent ardent support. That way, Prakasam's election as Premier became a reality.

Important Congress leaders like Maulana Azad continuously harped on the need of Rajaji getting elected Premier of Madras but none of those appeals ever worked the miracle. Rajaji by himself had no love for office in any selfish manner but I have it as my belief for long that he too had a *clique* in Madras and that *clique* was goading him towards the acceptance of office as Prime Minister. Rajaji being a good and loyal friend could hardly overthrow the influence of that particular *clique* which had always been egging upon him towards this and that. When he was once cornered with the question that he was rather

crazy for pomp and power in the Premier's chair, Rajaji meekly gave back a neat reply:

> "Do you think I am after a five-hundred rupees a month salary and odd responsibility?"

Indeed, he was sincere in what he said, then. He neither wanted that amount of money as salary nor any personal pride emerging from the Premier's chair but then his love for service and his weakness to be loyal to some of his very close friends and do what they wanted him to do, are certain aspects of the question and such aspects certainly gave the wrong impression to outsiders that Rajaji was an idle office-hunter! For all such delicate situations facing a politician in any western country, his personal publicity agent would have cleared doubts in a very clever way but neither Rajaji had any such agent, nor the numerous newspapers affectionately devoted to him in South India had the knack of interpreting the man in the all too correct light. It is his misfortune over which what possible remedy could we think of?

Meanwhile, Lord Wavell, the Viceroy in 1945, had initiated rapid moves in the political sphere of this country and Rajaji was more prominent in contributing his mite for the *Simla Talks* in 1945 and later on. Then on the formation of the Interim Government in September 1946 in Delhi, Rajaji was chosen a Member.

The *clique* in Madras within the Congress which originally opposed Rajaji's Premiership, later on made up with him and then turned its wrath against Prakasam and managed to oust him from office, giving place to one of Rajaji's followers Mr. Omandur Ramaswamy Reddiar.

As a Member of the Interim Government in Delhi from September 1946 to August 1947, handling the portfolio of Industries and Civil Supplies, we had not seen any outstanding stroke of reform emanating from him but then, his Department was such that we could hardly expect any from him either. Furthermore, Rajaji, a clever man, is never in his true form, when he was not placed on the top. In the Interim Government days, he was perhaps the most "silent Member", doing his Departmental work in quiet fashion like any Civilian official and at the same time the most efficient administrator.

GOVERNOR OF WEST BENGAL

VIII

The appointment of Rajaji as Governor of West Bengal came as surprising news to us all in Bengal. Various names were speculated upon but finally Rajaji's name was announced. He was selected because he has just that steadfast determination, that untalkative, unemotional pertinacity, that calm insistence that comes with a reserve of strength-qualities that have for long been associated with men of political talents. I have been, since then, asking several Bengalees who were capable of making an authoritative statement on the subject as to what the people's reactions were towards Rajaji's coming to Bengal. I then found that they were not fully against the proposal, though they would have preferred a Bengalee better. That was only natural with any province. If a Punjabi is asked to govern Bombay, it is but natural the Gujeratis and Marattas would have inwardly felt, why they should not have a Bombayite after all? One Bengalee spokesman however assured me that Rajaji was "the right type of man to put an end to all these communal disorders in Calcutta". He knew "what to do at the right time". Another Bengalee said that he would have liked Acharya Kripalani for the reason that the Congress President had a Bengalee wife

and that he would be generally welcomed by a section of the people in West Bengal but the fact was that the Acharya could not be spared from his more important position. It appears the Bengalees did not like Rajaji's policy of "appeasement" proposed in 1942 when Gandhiji was in jail, said yet another. These were various opinions but opinions there are everywhere on every question. These apart, Rajaji got a fine reception when he actually came down here and that was because, he was being sent by the grand organization that is the Indian National Congress and a full-fledged Congress Ministry in the Province welcomed him with heart and soul. There was an added reason for it in view of the fact that Rajaji and Dr. Ghosh, the Premier of West Bengal, happened to be both ardent Gandhites of the same pattern and are friends for over twenty-five years each having a rare and close liking for the other. Dr. Ghosh has much regard for Rajaji and that meant to us all from the beginning, the combination would be an ideal one.

Rajaji arrived in Calcutta by 'plane at mid-day on the fourteenth day of August, 1947 from Delhi and was met at the aerodrome by the out-going Governor Sir Frederick Burrows, also Dr. Ghosh, the Prime Minister. He drove to the Government House from the air-port covering a distance of eight miles thronged by people who cheered him. The hands of the *discontent few* were also not idle. Just ten fellows, from which party they came

I know not, held a placard asking him to "go back", at the gates of the air-port! Used to such demonstrations, here also he smiled at the resenting placards in good humour as he drove away, Governor Burrows joining him in the smile! It was all a little joke, after all!

Rajaji on arrival at Government House inspected a guard of honour and the saluting guns then went off. He met the Government House staff and spent the rest of the time talking with the Burrows-Couple who were departing the next day, as it signified the departure of British rule also from Bengal! Then, by mid-night, an Indian judge swore Rajaji into office. Clad in his simple Khaddar dress he went through the usual ceremony in a calm, dignified manner befitting the importance of his exalted office. Every one was solemn, every one had a feeling of respect and adoration for the eminent statesman from Madras who had come to Bengal now, not like the past Governors from Britain sent to India to *rule* the masses but Rajaji had come to actually *serve*! The ceremony over, the crowd dispersed but not before cheering him wildly. Even at the zero hour, surging crowds of people from Calcutta's vast population thronged at the gates of the Government House and uproaringly cheered the new Governor.

From 1854 to 1911 Bengal had twenty-two Lieutenant-Governors and between 1912 and 1947 the Province had ten full-fledged senior Governors, the last one being Sir Frederick Burrows, who saw the Partition of Bengal for

the second time in its history. Rajaji is however the first Indian Governor in Bengal to occupy the historic Government House in Calcutta. A man of simple tastes, on assuming office he wondered what he would do with such a gigantic residence with its elaborate 120 rooms! A witty comment was at that time made in a Calcutta *daily* by its Columnist who wrote:

> "Rajaji does not know what he would do with the 120 rooms in the Calcutta Government House. Let him not do anything with them, but let them remain!
>
> "Solomon the Wise, with all his wisdom had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines but never said that he knew not what to do with them!"

Rajaji, however at first, preferred to live in the Government House at Barrackpore away from the din and dust of the life of the Metropolis, situated as it is by the side of the majestic Ganges which flowed in all serenity. But then he changed his idea later and stuck on to the City residence itself. Why, I don't know!

The Government House in Calcutta is a big one and perhaps the *best* in the whole of India amongst buildings of that kind. With its vast green turfed lawns and imposing white structure in the centre with a flight of steps like a gallery on the northern side, this Government House

has accommodated many distinguished administrators of Bengal sent by Britain in the past. Here sat Baron Carmichael who used to go round Calcutta like Harunal Raschid (the Caliph of Baghdad) to study affairs *personally* and mete out justice to the people, and here also lived the Rt. Hon'ble Earl of Ronaldshay during the first world-war years, the one time ADC of Viceroy Lord Curzon of Keddleston. Ronaldshay now goes with the name 'Marquis of Zetland' and perhaps better known for his cultural studies in India and authorship of that famous book the *Heart of Aryavarta.* Here again lived yet another of Bengal's Governors Lord Lytton who was often rebuked by the "Tiger" Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, also yet another British cricketer of repute Sir Stanley Jackson who was sent to rule this troublesome province. Still more, there have been many men so important in the realm of "Governors of Bengal"! And then, came to this Government House the Rt. Hon'ble Sir John Anderson with his *Black and Tan* notoriety record in Ireland. He was specially chosen to put down the terrorists of Midnapore and Chittagong, also on the wake of Bina Das firing point-blank on Sir Stanley Jackson in the Calcutta University Convocation, 1932. Somehow, Sir John got on well, just having done his special job, with what success, I could never say!

Following Anderson, came Lord Brabourne who after a very successful term of office in Bombay as Governor

appointed to Bengal but passed away in his early forties to invoke the sympathetic feelings of the people because His Lordship died no sooner he came. The next man, Sir John Woodhead was but a temporary tenant of this Government House. Came the next man for the next four years (the second war-years of course) Sir John Herbert, who failed and failed miserably in office getting upon his head the wrath of millions, for, a famine had crept into the Province just then, when human beings were doomed to pine, languish, rot and die prematurely. God-made or man-made—that was a different matter! Herbert died in Calcutta sick and sorrow-stricken. Again, a temporary tenancy in the Calcutta Government House for Thomas Rutherford, a Civilian of long standing in Madras, at intervals, from his regular office of Governor of Bihar! Then only came the Australian, Mr. Casey, who after holding office for two years here even wrote a pungent and truthful book on his impressions. The last, and you might even say the least important of all these Governors of Calcutta, was of course Frederick Burrows, a London ex-porter whom his good fortune had flung into the Bengal Government House and during whose office, the severest communal clashes Bengal had ever seen continuously occurred, the peace of the Province broken completely, economic position muddled and finally, had even the Province cut into two! It might be that the Hindus of Bengal have now a *homeland* of

their own, free from the rule of the Muslims based on their numerical strength but then the *Partition*, is all sad history. To such a Government House which had accommodated Britishers of so many varying types comes a man of simple tastes and high idealism and to Rajaji a place like this must be a sheer luxury which he must have found loathsome!

The layman in Bengal could hardly gain an entrance into the Government House, Calcutta. He should have some specific business and prior arrangements should have been made. If sometimes the Governor had been out of Calcutta, then as a special case, friends and relatives of the Government House staff had some kind of an access. That way, one had an opportunity of having a look at this magnificent building. But all such conventions were thrown to the winds on August 15 last. A surging crowd of people forced their way into the Government House soon after Rajaji had hoisted the national flag on the green lawns at eight in the morning. The police of course could say nothing, because any resistance would have brought forth unnecessary clashes which every one sought to avoid that day at any cost.

Thousands, so entered the Government House that day and freely moved about. Sir Frederick Burrows was at that time getting ready to leave Calcutta for good and he was in one room while the crowds besieged through almost all the other rooms. Rajaji had been then to the Legis-

lative Chambers to announce the *arrival of freedom* in the course of a speech and he did not return until mid-day. Meanwhile, the crowds had gone into each and every room and exercised the "fullest liberties"! The result was damage done to Government House properties to the extent of about Rs. 10,000/-. Gandhiji bitterly complained about it at his prayer-meeting the next day.

The Government House, Calcutta is now vastly changed from what it was during the years that are past. Simple tea and tomato-sandwiches in evening parties take the place of gorgeous cocktail parties the British Governors gave at the cost of the Indian tax-payer. Where lounge suits, evening-dress and morning-coats were once compulsory as occasions presented themselves, visitors of His Excellency could now be found in simple *dhotis* and yet simpler *Khadi* shirts. Where the hot jazz music of the Governor's band blared and a hundred pairs of legs danced to favourite Western musical tunes in the *Ball Room* in the olden days, Bengali musicians in *dhotis* with their musical instruments like *Veena*, *Sitar* and *Harmonium* sing melodious *Bhajan Kirtans*, mostly on *Vaishnavite* themes, since Bengal is a stronghold of Vaishnavism. Musicians of repute like the blind-singer Dey and bold singer of the cinema world Pankaj Mallick give devotional recitals before His Excellency and a selected gathering of friends. The Government House where gorgeously liveried hall porters

and British ADCs with tip-tilted moustache received you in the past, we now find informal officers rendering you courteous service in the meekest way possible. Looking into all these, you see the revolutionary changes that have taken place of late in the life of a *Governor of Bengal* and the modes of living at his historical residence. Well, the India of to-day belongs to only Indians and that is the lesson we are reminded of forcibly when we make a comparative study of the Government House of even a year ago, from what it is to-day.

Writing towards the end of September, the Calcutta Correspondent of a famous Madras weekly *Free India* recorded:

> "We talk of news-makers in the world but in Calcutta, our Governor, H. E. Mr. C. Rajagopalachari happens to be the foremost news-maker. He behaves just like an American Governor of a State in his free social contacts with the people and this factor more than anything else is building up his popularity. For instance, the Government House is freely opened for any one to go and see the Governor on any business of importance. The usual parties restricted to *teas* are continued to be held and there are exchanges of views between His Excellency's callers and himself. He goes about the city addressing

meetings, opening institutions and being free with his hosts who invite him for entertainment. His gifts of fellowship are perhaps responsible more than anything else to build up his undoubted popularity more and more in West Bengal to-day. Those who go to see His Excellency once, come back fully convinced of his genuine purpose here and his great qualities of head and heart, and they talk of his warmth of heart and it is *not in the least* an exaggeration to say that they become *C. R.-chelas* at once."

"Tea for two" is an old saying but there are too many people in Calcutta! If Governor Rajaji set about entertaining the leading citizens of India's biggest city, one by one, to fulfil the adage "tea for two", he should be Governor of Bengal, for how many long years, God only knows! Therefore, he makes it a point of having tea at least two or three days in a week with a few leading citizens and the practice is much appreciated here. Here for the first time is a people's Governor and Rajaji is really that—as every one remarks after a meeting with him. Recently I had the privilege of meeting His Excellency *at tea* along with a dozen others both men and women and it was an interesting experience in itself.

I have been sipping tea with celebrities and non-entities in many parts of the world but I should say the

genial and hospitable atmosphere I experienced at Government House, Calcutta, that day I went to meet Rajaji is a fine memory. I accepted the invitation with some reluctance, for I fully believed that I would be required to sit for an hour in the drawing-room while the guests were assembling and until the great Rajaji should slowly descend the grand stairway with gubernatorial dignity while we guests should rise and bow and scrape and do him homage.

I had pictured him there in all his glory, the observed of all observers, and as he finally seated himself on his throne,, I saw myself among his satellites sitting around His Excellency as he haughtily told us what a great man he was. I could hear them all saying "Yes, Yes" to the self-centred great man, and I saw myself at the table listening to his admirers' praise and adulation.

But how different it all was! The stage was not set for a grand-stand entrance, there was no throne, no idol worshipping, no attempt to be the centre of affection. His manner was natural, and without affection. His Excellency himself arrived in time by half past four. He went round and greeted every one of the guests individually and during the next two hours, he was at each table chatting with the guests, discussing everything in a lighter vein. The warmth of a social gathering had to be heightened up only in that spirit and no one could do that better than Rajaji on such occasions!

GOVERNOR GENERAL

IX

There is a good deal of truth in people taking Rajaji as a *baffling* personality. In an earlier chapter of this book I have compared him to Europe's most baffling man Zaharoff, but I should think Rajaji is by far a bigger mysterious personality who creates confusion even in the most accurate student of men and deeds. He is extraordinarily clever and circumstances so play themselves admirably into his palms to suit his genius for creating more confusion! In Madras, the legislators after the 1946 election would not have him even as Prime Minister. In Delhi, when the Interim Government was formed, he was shunted out to play the *fifth fiddle* by the High Priests of the Congress organization! He was then given the least important portfolio in the Government, Member in charge of Industries and Civil Supplies. Rajaji being a great strategist accepted all these situations with the calmness of a philosopher, for, he knew like a gifted chess-player when to sit quiet and when to make his next move and in what direction, with caution and consideration. Truth or not, when *Freedom Day* was approaching, Rajaji in Delhi expressed a desire to retire from public life and take rest in Madras but then he might have equally known that he was not the man to be spared by the Congress Party to

"And when we think we lead we most are led." —*Byron*

go into restful life. Then a Governorship was pressed on him. He was given the most difficult province for stewardship and so he came to West Bengal.

Now on the *Freedom Day* there was no talk of Princess Elizabeth getting married on November 20, 1947 an occasion at which the Duke of Edinburgh's uncle, Governor-General Mountbatten had to be necessarily present. Somehow, the day having been fixed, Mountbatten planned to leave for England in November and the question of the Acting Governor-General arose. Now, according to old conventions, the seniormost Governor from any one of the three Provinces of India, viz., Bombay, Bengal or Madras had to be called in to act in that office in New Delhi. Sir John Colville had acted a number of times as Viceroy during Lord Wavell's absence and also once, during Lord Mountbatten's visit to England in January last year. But he was not coming this time. Next to Sir John, Sir Archibald Nye, Governor of Madras had the right to be called but he too was not mentioned. Perhaps, it was so that these two Britishers preferred not to go and allow an Indian Governor to have the honour. Naturally, the Governor of West Bengal was the inevitable choice and Rajaji had the unique honour of being so. Rajaji once made a *sporting offer* to Mr. Jinnah assuring him that the Congress would like to see him the first Prime Minister of a Free India but the League leader was not sportive enough to accept. Now

Rajaji was finding himself Governor-General of India, as Mr. Jinnah was of Pakistan. "The Press little imagined that a 'crank' like Mr. Rajagopalachari would become Prime Minister........." said Dr. T. S. S. Rajan in October 1938. Within ten years, the "crank" had become even acting Governor-General in a self-governing India, marvellous isn't it? Indeed, he even has the honour of being India's first full-fledged Governor-General now, since Lord Mountbatten is retiring from India for good by the middle part of 1948.

On November 9, 1947 two things of importance to Asia happened. One was, an Indian for the first time, became the Governor-General of his country and the other was, a *Coup D'Etat* was performed in Bangkok by Marshal Pibul Songgram, the Siamese military leader. In some respects, both these men have the same frame of mind and their methods of administrations too were somewhat identical. Both loved their people and intended to do good to those whom they ruled but both were very self-conscious and believed in dictatorial ways and had little understanding for the 'democracy of the common man' as the phrase is popularly understood. Both are loved by their people and equally hated by some. Both are lucky to seize power and both cleverly bide for their time to rise to the top from the bottom to which they sink at times. The glaring difference between the two is this. Songgram is a pure military man and nothing else but Rajaji is a great man with hundreds

of fine qualities merged together into that thin, wiry, physical frame.

By mid-day of November 9, Rajaji left Calcutta in a special plane for Delhi. He was accompanied by his daughter Sri Namagiriamma, also an ADC. The same day, a Government of India Press *communique* announced as follows:

> "The Governor-General of India, the Countess Mountbatten of Burma and the Lady Pamela Mountbatten will leave India on the 10th November arriving in London on the 11th November in order to attend the royal wedding. They will leave for India on the 22nd November arriving at Delhi on 24th November.
>
> "On the advice of the Government of India, His Majesty the King has been pleased to appoint His Excellency the Governor of West Bengal, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, as Acting Governor-General during the absence of the Earl Mountbatten of Burma..........."

On November 10, the Mountbattens left Delhi for London and in the Cabinet room of the Governor-General's residence a simple ceremony took place for the formal swearing in of Rajaji. Justice Kania, the Chief Justice of the Federal Court conducting the ceremony, had the acting Governor-General sworn in, administering the oath of allegiance and secrecy. A Proclamation was later on

issued by the Home Department about His Excellency having assumed office and the same was communicated to all the Ministers and Provincial Governments and other administrations in India. Rajaji shook hands with those present at the ceremony, Cabinet Ministers and Rajaji's two daughters—Sri Namagiriamma and Mrs. Lakshmi Devadas Gandhi.

Rajaji began his office as acting Governor-General in right earnest with all the dignity he could command. The first thing he did was to go round Delhi and visit friends. He called on Mr. Jagjivan Ram at his residence since he was gradually then recovering from the *air-accident* he suffered at Baghdad, while returning from England a few months ago. Rajaji also called on Gandhiji at the *Birla House* and was closeted with him for some time.

The acting Governor-General was virtually flooded with letters and telegrams of felicitations from the far corners of India and even from other countries abroad. Thankfully acknowledging the greetings, Rajaji issued a general Press statement which was just characteristic of the man to say things which no ordinary man ever said and in saying it, he had a clever twist and a turn in every sentiment expressed. He said:

> "My short period of service as Governor-General of free India has been the theme of many congratulatory messages from friends

throughout India. The previous history of the institution and office of Governor-General has given an undeserved importance to my short tenure as marking an obvious change in the status of India.

"Lord Mountbatten's Governor-Generalship was a voluntary arrangement of free India on August 15. My short period of office now is therefore of no great importance. Whatever change took place, did take place on Aug. 15. Lord Mountbatten is as much an 'Indian' Governor-General as I am now styled.

"All the same, I am very grateful to all the friends and associations who have sent me congratulatory messages, and express my sincere thanks. May India's difficulties be overcome and may we be enabled to put forth constructive effort so as to establish not only freedom but joy in India."

On the social side, His Excellency was as genial as he ever was and with the utmost freedom, he roamed about Delhi to see old friends and faces and to carry on informal conversations with one and all. A visit to Gandhiji was again repeated the very next day he assumed office and he received callers profusely and was engrossed with them in cordial conversation. For lunches and dinners, Congress-

men flocked to the Governor-General's residence and the Government House bulletins gave us news of the names of his assorted callers, drawn from all sorts of people. However, the number of European guests was minimized, as we could then see.

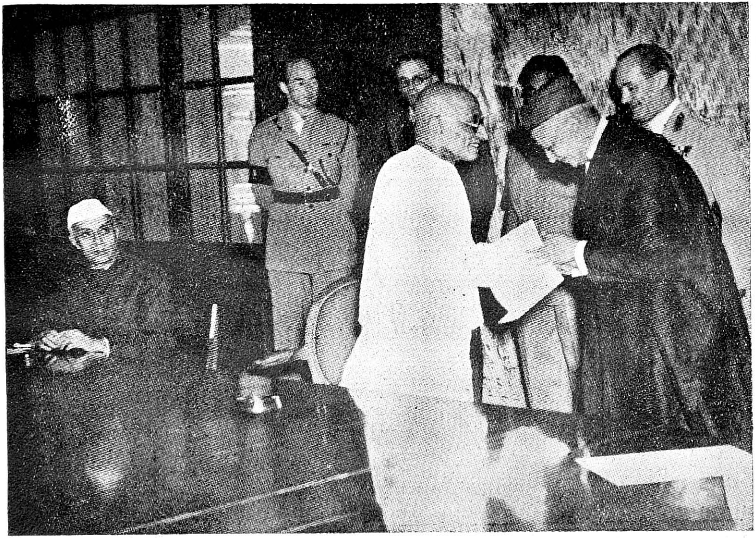
Among those who had the honour of lunching with the Governor-General at that time were some of his bitterest political opponents from the South and this is no surprise for those who understand the real frame of mind of this remarkable statesman that Rajaji is. For instance, one saw South India's Tamil Congress leader Kamaraja Nadar coming in and Nadar, more than any one else, was very much responsible to see Rajaji not becoming the Prime Minister of Madras in the month of April 1946, though both have now made up their old differences and are on cordial terms, so far as any outsider could gauge their present relationship. Yet, another interesting political opponent of Rajaji who went to lunch with him was none else than Mr. T. Prakasam, the man who actually became Prime Minister of Madras and about whose fall after a few months from the Premier's chair one learnt through the *Swatantra*, Rajaji had a part! Truth or not, many believe it to be so but the intricacies of Indian politics being what they are, and the disinterest of the *Indian Press* in general to probe into great depths and unearth vital political intrigues in their entirety being the same, impartial chroniclers of events are faced with great difficulties in

their way. What Mr. Prakasam then talked with Rajaji can't be a secret, because the luncheon table was also shared that day by other important Congressites like Pandit Pant of U. P., Mr. Mahtab of Orissa and Mr. Sukhla of Nagpur, Premiers all! Still, a third political opponent of Rajaji who walked into his parlour to share the Governor-General's fare was none else than the redoubtable champion of the Untouchables of India Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The Doctor had written a book in 1946 accusing the Congress of its part in dealing with the Untouchable question and there was none else to rebut his arguments than the able Rajaji with a counter book on the same subject in which the famous Congress leader justified all that his own Party had done for the *Harijans.* Those who saw the vehemence with which Ambedkar carried on his politics as the champion of the Untouchables of India before August 1947 could have hardly imagined that at the offer of office in the first Indian Cabinet, he would eat away all his previous politics and succumb to the lure of a Ministership. But, then, such things are not uncommon in Indian politics in which we see more *turn coats* than in any other country in the world, to tell the truth.

The Governor-General's activities in the capital were then, more or less, the same as a British Governor-General in the past. There was nothing much of a *Swadeshi* touch in all that he did. On November 19,

Rajaji sent a cable of congratulations to Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth. He cabled: "May I send on behalf of the Government and people of India their most sincere good wishes to Your Royal Highness and Lt. Mountbatten?" A simple sentence and a duty well performed, indeed! With that he did not leave affairs. The people of India being more conscious of the Royal wedding than the people of England, he had the ball room of the Governor-General's residence profusely decorated for throwing a lavish evening party and invited the elite of New Delhi to share the joys of the occasion. Only just three days earlier, there was an uproar in the Constituent Assembly that in the legislations enacted, the term "British India" be removed and the plain reference "India" be instituted! That was merely the voice of the hot patriot, not the man who had any keen understanding of the practical side of affairs.

Among his other activities might be mentioned his presence in the Governor-General's *special box* at the opening of the Constituent Assembly (Legislative section) watching the proceedings. During Rajaji's stay in the Government House, New Delhi, Mrs. Naidu who was having bad health also happened to be in Delhi and stayed with him. To look her up, Gandhiji arrived one day. When he did so, Rajaji warmly received the Mahatma and showered a great deal of choice flower petals on him, an act of gratitude for all that Gandhiji had been



"When I forget my sovereign, may my God forget me."
—*Lord Thurlow*

to his most beloved colleague in that grand National Organization the Congress is. When he saw Gandhiji just before he left Delhi, he found "the Mahatma was sad beyond words". Rajaji said: "What Mahatma Gandhi passionately hungers for is that those who have neither numbers nor physical strength and who now live in fear should be made to feel safe and breathe the air of friendship all around them. Let us do all we can to make our great leader happy and relieve him from the intense pain he is now suffering."

Speaking for himself, Rajaji said that "in Delhi, almost every face I saw was darkened by gloom, anxiety and bitterness" and that was all due to the strained feelings between the communities. He returned to Calcutta to resume his office of Governor of West Bengal after a fortnight's temporary tenancy of the Governor-General's House at New Delhi by November 25. Looking at the great honour that had been his, one is justly proud of the rise of this great politician by stages, almost in miraculous fashion! There is the dictum that some are born lucky, on some luck is thrust and some achieve luck. Perhaps in the case of Rajaji, the latter *two* have been in full play.

Then, on May 3, came the *news of news* to India from London! An official announcement from Buckingham Palace was released that King George VI on the recommendation of the Government of India had approved of

the appointment of Rajaji to be *Governor-General of India* when Lord Mountbatten relinquished office on June 21 this year. The news was received "with pleasure" in London, cabled *Reuter's* Political Correspondent. Lord Pethick-Lawrence, a former Secretary of State for India and a close friend of Rajaji was the first to come out with a profuse expression of approval of the appointment. "I am delighted to hear the announcement. Rajaji is not only a close personal friend of my own but is recognised as one of the *wisest* of India's great statesmen" His Lordship remarked. Similar sentiments were expressed by virtually hundreds of others the world over warmly approving of the appointment.

The *Press*, both in the United Kingdom and America was equally vociferous with praise for the apt choice made by the King of England in finding Lord Mountbatten's proper successor in India. "The respect he enjoys in Pakistan as well as in India augurs well for the efforts he will undoubtedly make to carry on the work of his old friend, Mahatma Gandhi, in promoting harmony between the two Dominions" commented the *Times*, London, in expressing pleasure at the appointment.

The *News Chronicle* thought that no wiser choice than Rajaji could have been made for the office. "Possessing the liveliest and broadest mind among Indian statesmen, 'Rajaji' as he is called, has been in closest spirit to Gandhi, especially in his consideration for Muslims" the paper wrote.

Lord Beaverbrook's popular Daily *Express* has sung Rajaji's praise in the same strain. "In C. R. India will have a Governor-General of subtle and calculated intellect and great persuasive powers" went on the lines of the *Express* Correspondent. Victor Lewis of the *Daily Graphic* indeed came out with a very *graphic* description of Rajaji's qualities of head and heart. "He has both a knack for getting things done as he wants them done—and age to carry weight in a land which so venerates age" Lewis recorded.

Even across the *Atlantic*, such unstinted praise for the first Indian Governor-General was noticed in the Press. Making a comparison of Lord Mountbatten and Rajaji, the New York *Herald Tribune* editorially wrote that "each is a man of talent, and integrity......... There are far too few statesmen of their calibre in the world, and Indians and the British have been fortunate in having two men of such capacity available during times of crisis". The influential *New York Times* added its own tributes when it remarked that "Mr. Rajagopalachari's outstanding quality according to observers of the Indian scene, both Britons and Americans, is his *integrity*".

The Press in India with one voice heralded the selection as significant. The *Statesman* was the first to come out with a timely and well-written editorial on the appointment under the caption "A Wise Choice".

The paper remarked that

> "if his advice is followed, it seems more than likely that freedom will neither be wasted on ambitious experiments nor corrupted by routine, of whose fallacies as well as value he is well aware."

The paper went on to further observe that

> "there is nobody in India to-day who seems so directly heir to Mahatma Gandhi's wisdom as the first Indian Governor-General-to-be."

The powerful newspaper, *The Hindu* of Madras wrote that Rajaji

> "has distinguished himself as a leader of unbending integrity, selfless devotion to duty and iron discipline. There is no doubt that his sage counsel, wise guidance and shrewd advice will be of the highest usefulness to his colleagues in the Cabinet........... His choice for the office is not a fitting tribute to his services and abilities, but also one calculated to subserve the best interests of the country".

Sentiments of approval flowed out from the editorial writer of the *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta. He wrote:

> "Having been a careful spectator and an earnest participant in the struggles of a nation

in the making he has come in intimate contact with every phase of human affairs and has attained a height which enables him to take a dispassionate view of things. This is why men of all communities find it easy to repose their trust in him—a fact which, in the present context of Indian politics, perhaps constitutes the highest compliment that can be paid to Rajaji."

The *Madras Mail*, yet another influential newspaper of this country editorially observed that Rajaji and Warren Hastings had many things in common—the one, the first Governor-General of British India, the other, the first Indian Governor-General of a free India. It went on to say that "Mr. Rajagopalachari's statesmanship, patriotism and long experience will make him an invaluable guide to India in the difficult days ahead."

Such were the warm tributes which were to come even within barely forty-eight hours of the news of appointment filled in the columns of the Press in many parts of the world. However, a very significant message that Rajaji at that time had, came from no less a person than the Pakistan Governor-General Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The *Quaid-i-Azam* telegraphed congratulations to Rajaji and viewed the appointment with warm approval. "Under your guidance I hope, will come real friendship between the two Dominions. It is no less essential to India than

to Pakistan" he telegraphed. The message was well received by Rajaji and he was prompt in assuring the *Quaid-i-Azam* that it had "heartened" him!

In Calcutta, from where I pen these lines the *talk of town* for several days continued to be the elevation of Rajaji to the position of the First Indian Governor-General of his country. Everywhere people expressed genuine satisfaction at the choice. That Rajaji should meet with such a universal acceptance at the honour that has come to him, is a unique tribute that he could ever have, not only from his own countrymen, but even from several important statesmen the world over, who had either known him personally or heard of his greatness in connection with the recent historical developments in India.

There are several stories connected with Rajaji becoming the first Indian occupant of the Government House, New Delhi. One of them is that in 1929 when he was in Delhi, he met Sir T. Vijayaraghavachari, then Vice-Chairman of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research. His son and another youngman who went to see the new Viceroy's House earlier in the day then joined the *big Two* in talk. One of the youngsters then said to Sir Vijayaraghavachari "I think, some day, you may live in this house". The Knighted South Indian remained silent. In another moment, Vijayaraghavan, now a distinguished Mathematics Professor, was quick enough to

say the same, facing Rajaji. "Or, perhaps, it will be yourself". "May be" replied Rajaji, with a wry smile. Eighteen years later when he did become the occupant of that Government House, Sir Vijayaraghavachari of course "arrived to stay" with him!

GANDHIJI AND RAJAJI

X

When the historian of the future sits down to record the events and personalities of importance in India during the first half of the Twentieth Century, of course, the pride of place will be given to the leader of leaders—Mahatma Gandhi. Next, three or four outstanding Indians will fire the historian's imagination and each of them have distinguished in their own way. Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. C. Rajagopalachari are perhaps the four other folk whose mass leadership in the political progress of India will constitute an important land-mark in our history. The role of the *three* besides Rajaji, is well known.

It is still the belief of hundreds, if not thousands, in India that Rajaji would not have risen to his present-day greatness but for the fact that he was always "sheltered" and stepped-up by Mahatma Gandhi. I don't know, but in which way Rajaji was indispensable to Gandhiji and *vice versa*, it would be an interesting story to have it only from Rajaji himself some day if we are fortunate. The precise nature of their relationship as friends and later on as *relatives*, never transpired in its entirety. There are matters on which one could speculate but even a very

shrewd Biographer, unless he had chances of intimacy with either Rajaji or Gandhiji could hardly be expected to state it all on good white paper with any sense of real authority. That Gandhiji loved Rajaji and Rajaji loved Gandhiji, is an *open book* to all of us. What sort of love was it? Why was it kindled mutually and whether it had led to great results by way of shaping the destinies of the four hundred million people of India, all that we have to indeed make a study. To be sure, the intimacy of these two great men did yield wonderful results in advancing the cause of Indian Freedom. Of that, there need be no doubt.

In the absence of any intimate acquaintance with either Rajaji or Gandhiji, any study of this *tale of two men* from a distance, could hardly lead me to express any definite opinion on their exact relationship. There are many identical qualities in the life of both these pátriots. For instance, they were *lawyers* in private life. Both believed in mass contact and had the welfare of the *Daridranarayan* of India at heart first and foremost in all that they did. Both were gifted with extreme shrewdness, both had character in private and public life. They were sensitive and gifted with a *sense of righteousness* in all that they did, because, consciously they felt that they were doing only the right thing however much others thought that they were in the wrong! Each had peculiar fancies and fads, and a critical attitude towards their opponents and yet, they had developed in them a creed of universal love

for their fellow-beings, so much so that they were often ready to forgive a foe even at the sacrifice of their own personal whims and fancies in the larger interests of serving a great ideal. Both had sacrificed a great deal in their personal life in order to steadily pursue their patriotic calling and public service. No wonder with such identical qualities in them Rajaji and Gandhiji remained the thickest of friends and closest of collaborators for a period of nearly thirty years.

Now we look into the features which divided them in certain respects. Difference of opinion in public affairs never led them to hinder their personal relations and the respect the one cherished for the other. That is something great indeed, an object lesson for our politicians in this country. Gandhiji somehow believed in India attaining salvation through the *Charka* and *Khadi* but I am not so sure that Rajaji thought so in his heart of hearts. Still, he was a champion of the *Constructive Programme* which Gandhiji initiated and that is because, he is a stern disciplinarian and would follow the leader, right or wrong. I have not come across any ultra-enthusiastic speeches from the lips of Rajaji glorifying the *Charka* cult during the last ten years at least, while at the same time bitterly ostracizing the machine age. Still, Rajaji supported the Gandhian programme of the Congress towards furthering the ideal of a Free India. On the other hand, Gandhiji was not as much enthusiastic about *Prohibition* as Rajaji turned out

to be! Yet, both of them together spiritedly preached the ideals of *prohibition* and *Charka* to the masses of India.

Rajaji had that quality of pleasing his political opponents but Gandhiji was a sort of dictatorial man. He must be taken for his word and followed! Rajaji at times would humble himself so low that he would prove himself an admirable *follower* as much as he is leader but Gandhiji would hardly be expected to dismount from the high pedestal. Not that Rajaji is any the less firm-willed. On the other hand, he is even more iron-willed than Gandhiji ever had been, and yet Rajaji behaved in such a tactful manner that you always never knew how dexterously he forced his will upon you! He did it all in a very subtle and pleasing way!

Rajaji's admiration for Gandhiji began from the days of the Passive Resistance campaign in South Africa. Then they met in Madras, once Gandhiji finally returned to India. Their acquaintance soon developed into a *friendship* and the *friendship* into an *intimacy.* The explicit obedience of Rajaji and the firm personal loyalty that he showed towards the Mahatma must have impressed him a great deal. At the same time, the remarkable brain power of this *South Indian Gandhi*, as Rajaji is popularly referred to now, must have also impressed Gandhiji that here was a man whose assistance and co-operation in the great task of organising a great struggle against British Imperialism could hardly be ignored. So they got on together all right,

put their brains together and worked on hand in gloves in all the campaigns, exchanging confidences, all for over a period of thirty years. If Gandhiji had a say in the matter, he would have of course frankly stated that in all that he did, he had the continued assistance and the proper type of assistance from none else than the wise Rajaji. Make no mistake about it. It is not only truth but a well deserved tribute to Rajaji's selfless sacrifices in serving his country.

In 1922 at the Gaya Congress Rajaji was in a peculiar position when the late Desabandhu Chittaranjan Das brought about his council-entry resolution. Rajaji's colleagues from South India like the late S. Srinivasa Aiyengar, A. Rangaswamy Aiyengar, Kasturiranga Aiyengar all had seen wisdom in the move of the Desabandhu as a matter of practical politics. It was not that Madras' first Congress Premier in the next decade, did not see clearly that to fight *British Imperialism* from Legislative Councils was a correct move but he was only then thinking of *Nestor of the Congress* that Gandhiji then was, languishing behind the Yerwada prison walls. Rajaji never wanted to betray his master at an hour like that under any circumstances. More so when Gandhiji was not there in person to have his voice felt. So he cut himself aloof from the leading Madras Congressmen who vociferously supported Chittaranjan Das. Men like Maulana Mohammad Ali, Rajen Babu and Rajaji decided to remain firm *No-Changers.*

Later on, when he found that Das had captured the imagination of the country and the Congressmen by virtue of his council-entry programme he executed with a few forceful master strokes within the legislatures, Rajaji concluded that the tempo of time was against Gandhiji and himself. So we found him then quietly retiring to his Pudupalayam Ashram, away from the limelight. Those who tried the councils as the correct method to humble the British Imperialists finally found to their cost the step was futile and that *non-violence*, non-co-operation as enunciated by Gandhiji, was much more a powerful weapon and that way, the Congress Councillors resigned their seats and came round, seeking Gandhiji's guidance, only to follow the Mahatma in his Dandi march Satyagraha. The astute Rajaji who had all along kept himself away from the Council-Entry favouring crowd of Congressmen now proved himself a pucca *Realist*!

Then, once the general elections of 1934 for the Central Legislature came, Rajaji thought that entry into Councils had to be tried then by one section in the Party and so, he gave all his support to the Congress candidates set up by the Party Parliamentary Board, but he himself carefully abstained from contesting any seat. In other words, Gandhiji and himself would now support those who thirsted for parliamentary work and yet they themselves had their conscience kept clear with the hope that even for the second time, Congressmen would turn up fully convinced that the

Councils were not the place to carry out anything substantial for furthering the cause of Indian freedom! Then at the right moment when the British Government was inaugurating Provincial Autonomy, Gandhiji himself blessed Rajaji to take up office as Madras' Premier. That was because the affairs of a difficult province like Madras should not be passed on to wrong hands. Once Rajaji became Premier, he administered it on the basis of what he thought was *right*. Whether the people also agreed with him in that, was a different matter. In those years, Rajaji was the most powerful factor within the Congress Working Committee too and indeed, it was stated that the policies adopted by the Congress Governments in the Provinces were mostly his brain-products. Truth or not, what Madras did first, the other provinces administered by Congress Premiers soon followed!

While in office Rajaji freely employed the use of the Criminal Law Amendment Act to suppress agitation. At the same time, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer was also making use of the *same law* in Travancore to put out political agitation against him that had cropped up. While Gandhiji would support Rajaji using such an extraordinary measure to throttle agitation in Madras, he never refrained from condemning Sir C. P. for making use of the same Act in Travancore! It was rather strange that two persons who did the same thing had to be judged differently by a great soul of Gandhiji's stamp.

The part that Gandhiji played in 1946 to install Rajaji as Prime Minister of Madras once again is now well known history of recent years. When he went to preside over the Hindi Prachar Sabha Convocation Gandhiji spent a good deal of time trying to conciliate the rival forces within the Congress in Madras but to his dismay he found that the Madrasis were at that time rather determined to go against him too in the matter. The rebuff then received by the Mahatma even angered him.

Gandhiji's article in the *Harijan* in early 1946 warning the people of Madras that they should not lose the valuable services of Rajaji also plainly established the partiality of the Mahatma for his closest disciple. There was nothing wrong in it. You and I would have behaved in the same way in similar circumstances, on account of friendly loyalties and continued comradeship.

Rajaji is a very unemotional man and I don't think he has ever blazingly expressed his real feelings within about Gandhiji in greatly flattering words. For instance, let us take the statement he issued to the Press on hearing of the sad news of Gandhiji's death in Delhi. He was then very brief indeed in what he said, brief because words usually fail when the heart is heavy.

> "We have been robbed of our greatest possession by a senseless lunatic. May God help India in this hour of her greatest distress.

May all hatred, all suspicion end with this sacrifice of our dearest leader."

Now as is well-known, Rajaji talks and talks before various audiences so freely and yet, in a moment of calamity when every one expected him to come out with a profuse expression of sentiments on Gandhiji, Rajaji belied all such expectations. He had only then *three poignant sentences*, of course pregnant with a lot of meaning in them. Those who read and re-read the lines could understand how deeply he felt within himself the tragedy. But even his calm cold-blooded nature could not prevent him from dashing off to Delhi by air-plane to be present at the funeral of the Mahatma. There he did not orate anywhere, he did not go to the radio to speak to the nation, he issued no Press statements, nor give expression to platitudes about the martyr who sacrificed his all in the cause of Indian freedom. He was all calm, dignity and concentration that day.

Then an occasion presented itself a fortnight after the tragedy, when Rajaji had to openly give expression to his genuine feelings on the Mahatma. Even here, he was very restrained in what he said. That was when he spoke through the *All India Radio* from Calcutta after immersing the ashes of Gandhiji in the Ganges at Barrackpore, on Friday, February 12. His broadcast address that day was a very touching message, delivered in all solemnity and sincerity of feelings. Yet, there was no trace of emotion

"And from his ashes may be made
The violet of his native land."

—*Tennyson*

in the words that fell out of his lips. There was sense in what he spoke, a sense of great affection and regard for the departed soul, so clearly traceable from the talk. The more you read the words that Rajaji uttered then, the more you understood his greatness. Even while making a speech relating to a calamity which moved the whole world into sorrow he had a way all his own in neatly putting his thoughts with a touch of the tried artiste. Here is what he said then:

> "So it is all over. The world feels so empty, dreadfully empty. The bird escaped at 5 p.m. on Friday, the 30th January. The body remained with us and the lingering smile on the face kept the illusion going for some time. But on Saturday, the 31st of January on the banks of the Jumna we consigned the body of our beloved leader to the flames in accordance with the wisdom of our ancestors. Then we scraped together all that was left behind. Devotion made us see Bapuji in the ashes and the orphaned people fondly held on to the thought. But solemn wisdom of our ancestors again called us to consign the ashes to the elements and turn our thoughts to God. So we have entrusted the ashes to *Holy Ganga* and prayed. And we are returning home with heavy hearts, feeling a void all around. May

> our thoughts every day at the hour when Bapuji fell turn to him—our beloved teacher, our "Ajatsatru", our "Satyadharmaparakramah" who to countless millions, was an unfailing physician, who removed fear and ever sought to increase love . . . ."

There are several stories current in certain circles, stories which would illustrate the deep affection Rajaji and Gandhiji mutually possessed for each other. Unless there was a Boswell by the side of his Johnson, perfect recording of all of them is well-nigh impossible. Nor had I any early determination to play Boswell either to Gandhiji or Rajaji.

HIS IDEAS

XI

Rajaji is made of a fusion of excellent qualities that usually make, what we call, "a full man". He has something of an *artiste* in his thoughts and deeds by which I mean that consistency is not a special virtue with him and he is consistent only with the *essentials* and is contradictory at times and if he is so, he is not even always aware of it. Once his attention is drawn to anything, then he shucks his shoulders as though he had woken up from a terrible day dream but generally, he is firm-willed, steady, and knows his path as clearly as an eminent sea-farer knows his nautical route.

Rajaji is a very clever man and therefore, the average *mediocre* despises him simply because he is "unfathomable"! He is not such an impossible man either and yet people think that he is! He is very plain with everybody, speaks everything without reserve and yet everybody thinks that he is neither plain nor frank! I cannot explain why such an uncharitable impression of him should be entertained by any. From the very very meagre personal contacts I have of him I found him a very likeable person in many ways and those who do not get on well with him are those who go near him with all

sorts of selfish designs to satisfy their own interests. Rajaji is too shrewd indeed for such types of people. He is never harsh in his spoken words and never unkind in treatment towards any. In fact, he is all politeness to one and all, very genial and respectful in speech and all kindness to his visitors but then he could also be rough, impudent in speech and haughty if he so chose to be! So long as a man has no selfish schemes about him, he would always find Rajaji a very ideal companion, because Rajaji himself has no anchorage in things and possessions, so far as I know. He neither covets wealth nor pomp or glory for himself personally. If he loved power, it is because he wanted to serve those whom he loved to serve. That way, he had an element of extreme unselfishness which I have always admired in the man.

The late Deenabhandu Andrews had written a book interpreting "Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas". Equally, one may well write an elaborate volume interpreting Rajaji's ideas. They are indeed rich and they are useful for the present and coming generations because Rajaji is one of the greatest politicians of our times. However, a little examination of some of his most important ideas could be gone through here. Rajaji thinks that once an election is over and a majority party has come to power victorious, then that party should be allowed to carry on its policies unhindered and without serious opposition. He said so in the Madras Legislative Assembly during his Prime

Ministership days. This is a view which is very controversial. An opposition should be there in a legislature to offer healthy criticism and if the party in power had such a clean-cut majority on its side, why should it bother about any opposition that it may face on the floor of the House?

When Mr. Langley, an European legislator in Madras charged the Congress Party in 1939 as being "totalitarian" in its policies on account of its mammoth majority, Rajaji came out with the following reply:

> "What are we to do for it? (Laughter). We are a large majority. We are *totalitarian* not because we are oppressive, not because we want to suppress others, but because all of them have voted for us; the majority wants us. It is nothing else. We are totalitarian in the merely mathematical sense. (Laughter)."

At times Rajaji with a worried mind comes out with certain sentiments which could hardly be expected from the lips of a tried statesman of his stamp. I shall illustrate:

For instance, he once told the Andhras the following:

> "You do not know the clay of which I am made. If you think that you can extract work from me by such bitterness it is quite

> likely that you will fail in your hurry to make me work."

Again, at a public meeting he advised his audience as follows:

> "If anything happens anywhere the best course is not to hold a public meeting but to complain about it to your Government."

After all, no one rushes to hold a public meeting in India unless petition, persuasion, and other peaceful methods failed completely, methods including writing to the daily Press epistles signed *pro bono publico* but then one wondered why should Rajaji be so upset about public meetings and resolutions if he carried on an all-powerful government?

Then he comes down! We have our sympathies when he talks of himself in a very meek manner. He said at one time:

> "I have no experience in governing a country. I have some experience in conducting cases in courts. That experience is of no use in governing the country. The habit of speaking for a party is of no use in administration. My twenty years' experience as a lawyer at the Bar is of no use to me."

He said so during his Prime Ministership days in Madras but he need not .speak for a single party in the

administration of West Bengal to-day, for, the Governor is a mere guiding figure and is above party and politics and certainly the friend, philosopher and guide and not an active policy-initiator himself! As such, the rich wisdom that he possesses in administration can amply be of help to the Ministry of the Province and that indeed is a very valuable help.

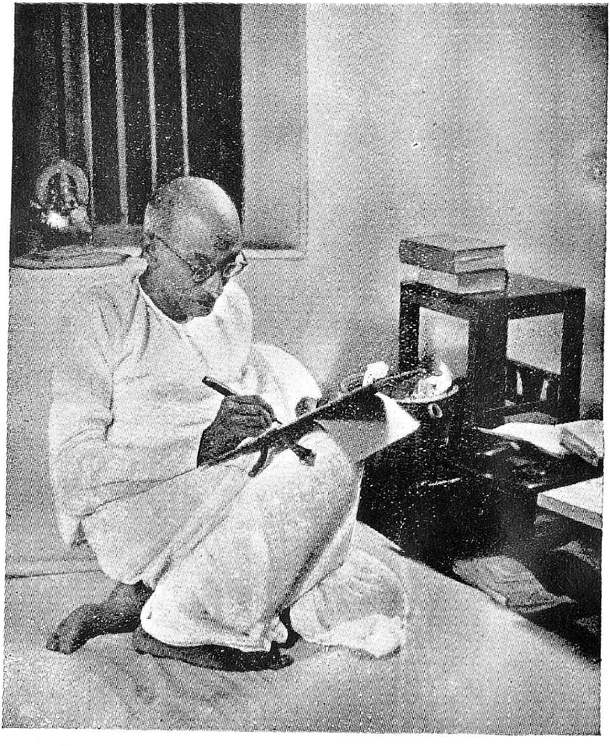
In the matter of social reform, the whole of Madras had never known a better Congressman who was so genuine about it than Rajaji. He is a great apostle of denunciation of all shams and falsities, with his fine trenchant picturesque scorn of all unrealities. With his hammer strokes, he crushes many an accepted old belief and many a well-built old Philosophy. And it is because of this he is hated. And yet this genius who is hated, misunderstood, rejected, is not without his consolations; for in moments of ecstasy he sighs in his heart; "How grand it is to fight, to be yourself at all hazards, to live and die for your own ideas, to be different from others, to fight in the good fight for freedom for life, for glory, for vision! To be unafraid, unabashed, unapologetic, unvanquished, undaunted, unwelcome! What a triumph to be hated for Truth's sake!"

We have already seen in a very early chapter of this work how he allowed *Pariahs* to operate the water taps in Salem during the Municipal administration of that town. He continued that sort of

broad outlook throughout and when Gandhiji included abolition of *untouchability* in his constructive programme, Rajaji was most happy that this was after all an essential plank in the Gandhian charter of work. At no time he was a very orthodox Brahmin. He freely moved with those people other than that of his own caste, ate with them and even advocated inter-marriage between the various castes and races of India. He firmly believed in the right of free marriage for Indians, ignoring the social dividing lines in this country. He thought that would certainly help the path of cementing better inter-communal relations than any other scheme of work undertaken towards such an ideal. In fact, at his Convocation Address in Dr. Karve's Women's University in Poona four years ago, Rajaji dealt at great length on this particular problem and it was a matter of wise comment in the newspapers at that time. In his own family, he set the fine example long ago, that he a Brahmin had his daughter Lakshmi married to Devadas Gandhi, a *Vaishya*, who is of a lower order of caste, as defined by the great Manu.

In the matter of removing untouchability and serving the cause of Harijans, Rajaji had been a tower of strength from the very beginning of the Non-co-operation days and when Dr. B. R. Ambedkar two years ago published a monumental work decrying the work of the Congress for the Harijans, Rajaji came out with a spirited reply. It was

C. R. VII



"And one man in his time plays many parts."
—*Shakespeare*

a very convincing book which explains completely the nature of the work the Indian National Congress as a whole was able to render to the Harijans for over twenty-five years now. Ambedkar could hardly reply to Rajaji's retorting book.

One of the questions many of my friends from South India often ask about Rajaji is whether he had ever expressed any opinion in favour of linguistic provinces. He might have, or he might not have. I have not come across any of his views in the matter. But I know he did not favour the coming up of a linguistic province like *Andhradesh* ten years ago. Not that he objected to it himself but in the interests of the larger unity of India, I believe, he might have felt that the time was inopportune but if the Andhras were to get a separate province for themselves, Rajaji could hardly understand why his own people the Tamils could not have a province of their own, for, he above all had an inner pride that he was a son of Tamilnad, every inch a *Tamilian* and what is more, a facile writer of the romantic Tamil language and speaker of it on public platforms with rare charm and dignity.

Rightly or wrongly, the Andhras had always entertained a sort of suspicion against Rajaji since his Madras Premiership. They thought that he was responsible for their not getting the much cherished goal of a province all for themselves. The Madras newspapers have not thoroughly gone into this question nor have they thrashed out all its im-

plications supported by relevant documents connected with it. The Andhra Province question and Rajaji's part in the matter, therefore remain a hidden secret even unto this day! Even men like Mr. Prakasam who is somewhat in the know of affairs, have never frankly and fearlessly stated all that they know of. However, some of the facts connected with this question as I have been able to gather from notes kept from time to time may be of interest to the public. Even a biographer should have a point of view but in an affair like this, he can only be a faithful chronicler of events and sequences based on published news in our daily papers. He could hardly tread the dangerous path of *comment* unless he had atleast that *precious little* evidence to deal with adequately.

Now, during Rajaji's Premiership, the Madras Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a resolution demanding a separate Andhra Province. It was forwarded to the Secretary of State with the necessary comments from the then Governor Lord Erskine but till this day, none knows what reply did Lord Zetland send to Madras. However, Rajaji was reported to have told Lord Erskine then that if an Andhra Province were to come, the streets of Madras would run with blood! I cannot at all swear by this statement but at any rate even responsible Andhra leaders talked about it that way in those days. If Rajaji had said so, small

blame to him. Territorial divisions when first attempted bring about clashes and bloodshed, such as occurring recently in the Punjab.

That the Andhras were very keen to ascertain the reply of Lord Zetland to the representations made by the Madras Legislature on the Andhra Province question, went without saying. They awaited in vain for a time. Then they wanted to send an Andhra Deputation to England for the purpose. But that never came to pass. Yet when the Speaker of the Madras Assembly at that time Mr. Bulusu Sambamurthy proposed to go to England to study Parliamentary Procedure, he was asked to meet the Secretary of State and find out the position. Mr. Bulusu made elaborate preparations for the journey but at the eleventh hour he was advised not to go by Gandhiji and he did not go! The Andhras were then restless all the more. Now they entrusted their persistent inquiry with Sir S. Radhakrishnan, the Philosopher, the Spalding Professor of Comparative Religions at Oxford. He met Lord Zetland and also had a talk with the late Dr. Raghavendra Rau who was then Adviser to the Secretary of State for India. Though Dr. Rau rose to dizzy heights of office including an acting Governorship in the Central Provinces, he was of *Andhra blood* and was on the side of his people in their demand for a separate province. What the conversation was between these two, it is impossible for me to say at present. But it is believed that

Dr. Rau showed some letters that passed between himself and Rajaji on the question of Andhra Province, before he sailed for England. The sum total of all these talks according to the echoes heard in Madras was that both Lord Erskine and Rajaji never seriously favoured the formation of the Andhra Province at that time. In this connection, I myself am driven to ask here the same question which Jesting Pilate asked in his day "What is the truth?"

There was yet another episode in connection with this Andhra Province affair. Mr. Prakasam, the Andhra Congress leader in the course of a speech at the Andhra Mahasabha in 1941 casually suggested that neither the British Government nor the Congress High Command was against the formation of an Andhra Province and that there was some *hidden hand* which was doing a piece of tricky work. The *Madras Mail* while publishing this speech made an editorial comment. Rajaji immediately protested against the *Mail's* comments with a letter which the Editor of course undertook to publish if the writer would only omit such expressions as "lie and mischievous lie" from it. The *Mail* also later made a reference to the letter Rajaji wrote to the Editor protesting. After seeing all these, Mr. Prakasam again made a statement. He said that if Mr. Rajagopalachari felt that his was the *hidden hand* behind Lord Erskine, he was not in a position to contradict it.

I have merely recorded the facts as they were at that time about this matter according to newspaper reports. What the truth is, Rajaji alone can clearly explain. In the absence of any such explanation, I could hardly say that all the suspicions the Andhras raised against Rajaji are based on concrete grounds.

About the Andhra Province itself, men like Dr. Raghavendra Rau felt that it was such a simple affair if only the Congress Working Committee wanted to get for the Andhras what they wanted. "A powerful politician like Mr. C. Rajagopalachari could always do it quite easily" said Dr. Rau to me in the course of a conversation I had with him in New Delhi in November, 1941. But then, my own doubt is that whether the question of a linguistic province had the least chance of being considered either by the Working Committee of the Congress or the British Government so early as 1941! I do not think so. If the Andhras were to get their province, there was no reason why the claimants for other linguistic provinces should be denied their claims. In a way, the problem was a very thorny one ten years ago and it continues to be so even to-day, in spite of the mere *paper resolution* of the Madras Legislature. Even granting that Rajaji did not champion the Andhra Province case many years ago, is he blameworthy on that account? He should have been on firm grounds in taking such an attitude but whether he was

really unenthusiastic about it, it is not possible for any to definitely assert, from the available evidence.

A good deal of odium had been placed on Rajaji's head for the stand he took in 1942 regarding the recognition of the principle of Pakistan. To-day, we have lived up to find that Rajaji is a prophet, rather a political prophet of no mean order, in as much as he clearly saw through that there was no other go for us but to recognize Mr. Jinnah's demands and for all I know, if we had recognized it as early as 1942, it might be even that the status of India to-day would be different from what it is. Rajaji who was prepared to take the fullest responsibility for everything that happened, if only his formula was recognized, could have I am sure, brought us back to the clearest vision and sanity in politics. Not only he could have done it with us but even with the Leaguers I am sure but the obstinacy shown by the Congress organization at that time in unceremoniously throwing out his "formula" had not a little helped to harden up the hearts of the Muslim Leaguers in the following years, with the result they stood firmly that they should have either Pakistan or they would thwart any and every political advancement in the country. After all, what we willingly and voluntarily failed to give the League in 1942 in all grace, we have now given, five years hence, forcibly and in an utterly helpless manner. Rajaji was every inch right with his formula at that time!

Prohibition is his vicarious headache! He could never understand whether human nature being what it is, could be turned from drunkenness into sanity overnight! Not that I myself use alcohol I defend the freedom of people to freely use wines. I myself am a teetotaller now and have never been especially fond of alcoholic drinks but I always believed that gradual temperance instead of total prohibition was the sanest and surest path to achieve the reform in this field. I had to come to such a view because of my stay in the United States when an Act of prohibition was in existence much to the eye-sore of the Federal Administration faced as it was with the menace of boot-legging and gangsterism. Rajaji is a great idealist as far as this one moral reform is concerned and no argument could shake him from his firmly planted views on the question.

Many wonder whether Rajaji is blessed with a sense of humour but then the question to be first taken into account is what sort of humour, it is! As one who had never been outside India, his manner of giving out jokes and telling anecdotes have a sort of originality all his own. They are not of the *Pat-yarn* pattern, to be sure. Westerners could hardly appreciate some of the jokes of Rajaji properly and they come creeping in a lot when he is on his feet addressing public audiences. But to the simple minded among our own countrymen his witticisms provide a real feast. So they say!

Rajaji has a flair for telling small stories or parables to illustrate his arguments when he speaks in public. The meaning of many of these stories or the humour in them deserve careful studying rather.

At Guntur, Madras, he once told an audience ten years ago:

> "Your Premier is not only a glass tumbler but also a dealer in glass tumblers. If you deal with him harshly or roughly all the glass tumblers may be broken. Till you find another to carry the load, please treat him delicately."

At Anantapur he once described himself as a carrier of a gunny-bag full of clay-pots!

At Ellore he compared the Congress Ministry of his time to a horse! And then sounded a piece of advice as to how the *horse* should be dealt with. Said he:

> "Treat it like a good horse. Talk to it nicely and gently and pat it gently when it slows down . . . . You must drive the animal through love and not by the whip. If you use the whip there is a tendency on the part of the animal to lie down stubbornly without proceeding, as troublesome horses generally do."

After he became Governor in West Bengal he told a Rotary meeting addressed by Dr. Grady, American Ambassador in India, a fine parable which is a classic in itself. It was this:

> "Things of so diverse a nature as oil, which is greasy, unclean and unpleasant to handle, and caustic soda, which causes irritation and burns, when combined, give us excellent soap. I hope that the caustic soda of Russia and the oil of the USA will one day mix and give us the soap we so much require for washing a dirty world."

Rajaji could prove himself a genial train-companion. He mixes up with his fellow-passengers pleasantly enough while travelling and chats with them freely on everything under the sun, perhaps with the exception of serious politics! They are reserved for the Press in the form of statements or utterances from the platform to admiring crowds. Even politics, he does discuss, especially with those for whom he takes a special liking but he does not do so heartily.

Three years ago, he one evening got into a train proceeding towards Madras from Coimbatore. He had an upper-berth in a second-class compartment. He fell into conversation with a sixty-five year old doctor who looked rather younger in appearance for his actual age. What

was the secret of this under-age appearance on the part of the Doctor? That was the question. Rajaji sought to know the answer. "Regular habits, regular meals, regular sleep, regular rest" the doctor answered.

"And also cold bath" added Rajaji smilingly.

The other passengers travelling were of an assorted kind. After a few minutes pleasant chat with one and all, he jumped on to his upper-berth with good agility, that surprised others. He lay awake on the spread out bed. The scene that he must have seen in the compartment then must have shocked him—the scene of men opening whisky-flasks and soda bottles and drinking merrily!

That made no difference to the companionship Rajaji sought to maintain with his fellow travellers. At Arakonam, a place near Madras, he got up and again talked about with his travelling mates. Then before reaching Madras, a friend brought in a tray of tea and biscuits, catered by an European firm. Rajaji himself volunteered to make tea for the rest and he actually mixed black tea with cream and asked others about the limit of sugar they needed for their cups. It was interesting to see him behave in these matters with such expert parlour manners!

On alighting at the Madras terminal station, Rajaji was so careful as to courteously take leave of one and all who were with him in the compartment, to their sheer amazement!

In Christmas week three years ago, Rajaji was in Salem to attend the District Prohibition Conference. He returned to Madras the same day he arrived there and with him were two friends. They all had first-class tickets, but no train accommodation! The Railway folk at Salem were obliging. Finally, he found two first-class accommodation with great difficulty. Then there was still a third man for whom a place had to be found. Rajaji got into a second-class compartment. The inmates here got on to their feet to do homage to the patriot. He himself then helped removing the kits of his friend and dumped them on to a seat. The train moved on by this time and in motion, he jumped out to the platform with the spirit of a lad, and then got into his first-class compartment. The *feat* shocked every one! Imagine this sixty-five year old man (he was then that) leaping out of a compartment in semi-darkness with the devilry of a champion circus performer as if in a 'leap and catch' show! Well, that is Rajaji in perfect health of body and mind!

THE ARTISTE

XII

If Rajaji were to be a mere prolific lawyer or a politician he would not be counting so much in the eyes of people as he is being regarded to-day. He is also a man of character as character is understood in India, a non-smoker, teetotaller, vegetarian and one who keeps himself away from the "ladies' sports and frolics" as the Elizabethans used to say. Added to these virtues his vast knowledge of affairs, tact, priestlike smoothness and scholarly poise, his infinite capacity to take things calmly and judge them in a shrewd manner, all these make him a man of real greatness in the eyes of his countrymen.

Wrote Mrs. Sarojini Naidu on the "South Indian Gandhi":

> "His matchless intellect is admired by the whole nation but only those who have the privilege of intimate friendship with him realize the deep and delicate tenderness of his nature and his sensitive response to all forms of beauty in nature, art, literature and human conduct."

Few words these, the tribute of our great poetess but every word so true and full of great meaning.

Rajaji is a lucid writer of the English language. I have gone through a number of pieces his pen has produced. His booklets on *Prohibition* are interesting and valuable. They could be taken as works of reference by any research fellow. His exposition of the untouchability problem is equally thought-provoking, though many would not share his views on the institution of caste. Somewhere he has defended that obnoxious system in admirable terms with the rare shrewdness of a *Pundit* of yore. Besides all these, he has written a number of magazine articles on a series of topics telling the world what his views are on men and matters. The philosophy of Socrates seems to have attracted him and he has expressed that admiration in an authentic booklet he wrote on that immortal Greek. This work is in Tamil and was received so well on publication.

Rajaji wields considerable influence with the people of his Province through his books—mostly Tamil books. There are scores of them. In simple Tamil prose he has told us the full story of Vyasa's *Mahabarat* and it is a scholarly work. He has written another on the "care of children", an essay on "Marxism" and his several short stories are marvellous works. Equally in English, his lines are telling. His book the *Way Out* is a treatise on his political stand taken in 1942 regarding the recognition of the principle of Pakistan. His earlier booklet *Chats Behind Bars* is also a revealing work on his

prison experiences. Besides these, he has rendered into Tamil the sayings of Marcus Aurelius. What is more, Rajaji has been a frequent contributor to Tamil journals on very useful and practical themes of every day interest to his people. In token of his scholarship, the Osmania University of Hyderabad conferred on him an honorary *doctorate*, which he however does not use as a prefix to his name.

Rajaji not only wrote himself extensively but encouraged meritorious writers in the South. With them, he never generally discussed any big politics but preferred to talk of men and matters in general. Ten years ago, I once met him at a dinner organized by a Congress Minister, S. Ramanathan, at the *Bharati Club*, so named after the patriotic verse writer Subramania Bharati. There, Rajaji was at ease freely conversing about books and authors. When a mutual friend casually mentioned to him that I was then engaged in making a study of him, with a cold indifference he brushed aside the information and walked away. That is just characteristic of him and I at once realized his greatness then and there.

Years later Mr. K. Chandrasekaran, a very gifted writer both in English and Tamil, a warm admirer of Rajaji in every way, told me an interesting story which illustrated one aspect of Rajaji's cleverness. Let me put the incident

in Chandrasekaran's own words:

> "I wrote a sketch of him in Tamil years back after his resignation of office, I believe in 1942, in a monthly called *Shakti*. I remember ending the analytical sketch with a sentence from Kural*........... Since I did not sign it, he himself hardly knowing I did it asked me to read it. I finished reading it in his presence and waited for his opinion. He avoided expressing himself and then disappointed me who was eager to receive his free remarks."

That is just Rajaji! For all I could think of, once the piece was read, he should have quickly grasped Chandrasekaran himself wrote it, as judged from the way the ideas were well arranged and the clear style used. Hence, the reason for his silence, I should imagine.

As a speaker, he is convincing above everything else. He always speaks without notes or prepared papers. Shortly after he became Premier, one day he was leaving his office room to attend a Cabinet meeting convened to consider his budget proposals. Just then, his personal clerk gave him a few printed sheets on which Rajaji had blue-pencilled certain items a few months back. But the

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* A classical book of maxims in Tamil by Saint Thiruvalluvar.

Premier would not take the sheets with him. He went to the meeting relying on his own memory to quote facts and figures. Further, he has a profound knowledge of the art of debate. To see him engaged in it, would be to see eminence in action.

Rajaji is no orator to be sure. His speeches are not enthusiastic outbursts but calm personal conversations with large audiences. He talks in a public meeting as if he would talk to a friend. Every sentence that comes out of his lips is carefully weighed, dressed up and delivered to satisfy those whom he addresses. It is possible that you may differ sometime with him after you had left the meeting. But then and there, it is impossible for any one not to be convinced by Rajaji's arguments. In brief, he possesses such telling capacity and persuasion in an easy manner! Usually, he employs simple sentences to speak. But if they turned out to be complex, then be sure that he is talking on something over which he does not want to be all too plain with you! He may have good reasons for being so. We have to understand him well. And no speech of his, I think, is complete without narrating some striking story to illustrate his argument.

In personal conversation, Rajaji could be full of charm, if he wants to be so. It is then that you understand his genius. He is never emotional, even *cold-blooded* you might say, but at heart he is sound. That is the hall-mark of a *Realist*. In 1940, two of his young nephews suddenly

died of fever, all in a week's time. He took the tragedy in a calm way, when he said:

> "This calamity should have brought honour if they had died for the sake of the Motherland instead of dying of fever."

He might like a person within but then, he must be clever enough to know it, though seldom any sign of it is outwardly manifested. Rajaji has a way of being brutally offensive at times even with his good friends he loved at heart but if they happened to be as sensitive and self-conscious as he, then they were lost before him. He is witty and his witticisms could even sting at times but then, you had better take him in the real light! He employs various devices to tactfully fathom the depths of the mind of his callers and friends. The traits of the eminent Criminal Courts lawyer that he once was in Salem, could hardly leave him even to-day! He wants to get at the truth by cross-questioning and cross-examination. We have to be always guarded against the *lawyer* in him. But, behind all these tactics which are just child's play to him, the real *humane man* possessed with that chaste love for humanity at large like Whittier remained, and there and there alone, his real greatness could be traced.

To argue a point with Rajaji is a skilful effort in itself, mostly a vain job! He leads you nowhere, he gets you nowhere! On the other hand, he would even confuse you!

For instance, if you told him that the 'cow happened to be a useful animal', he would not straightaway say either *aye* or *nay* but in good humour, would put a counter question. 'Before we decide the cow's usefulness, Friend, let us first of all decide what is a cow', he might tell you! You feel amused, so is he, after leading you to amusement. Then, where do you get to, with your belief in the cow's usefulness? Mr. Jinnah long understood this strange *Rajaji-method* and manner of argument and swore that he would be happy to discuss anything with any one else but this 'impossible' strategist!

Rajaji's broad universalism is yet another point in contrast to his usual cut and dry mannerism at times. For one thing he is magnanimous to a foe. He has that rare quality to forgive one—personal or political. S. Ramanathan, an old Congress colleague of his from the Non-co-operation days strayed away for a time but when the great leader formed his first Congress Ministry, he brought him in as Information Minister. He is again kicking and is out of the Congress frame but Rajaji quite recently asked a friend whether Ramanathan could not be brought round once again to his side! Equal was the magnanimity he showed in the case of his old friend Dr. T. S. S. Rajan! In December 1936 Rajan offended his feelings but in June, exactly six months later, we found him working as Health Minister in the Congress Cabinet! It was a great surprise to the people of Madras but then,

"Do not care how many, but whom you please."

—*Publilius Syrus*

Rajaji's ways were as such, rather inscrutable, you might say!

I have heard him speak only once on a public platform. It was at a meeting nearly ten years ago, over which he presided at the Gokhale Hall and had Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer to speak on his master stroke in reforms, the Travancore Temple Entry Bill. I believe the meeting was held some time in September 1937. When Rajaji stood up to speak, there was the usual ovation. A slim, bald-headed figure, made conspicuous by his black-glasses, he talked in his ringing voice. Not a gesture or the sign of the hand was seen while he was speaking. He stood erect there having his hand rested on the table in front. Words came out of his lips with ease. He went on speaking for a quarter of an hour without any effort. He was not in the least affected by the continuous ring of cheers which came from the audience, his speaking mode never varying from the beginning to the close. His intentions were clear and he is a type of speaker who appeals to the scholar and the mob alike.

Rajaji is one of the most loved amongst living South Indians and most respected in all India politics. He is a loyal friend, has the virtues and weaknesses of a politician of modern times and undoubtedly one of the ablest as far as brains go. American author John Gunther was very much impressed by him that he unreservedly paid many

rare encomiums to this Indian leader in his book *Inside Asia*. "He is one of the half-dozen most important men in India . . . . An accomplished dialectician, he is sometimes called the 'Tamil Mahatma'; the story is that at those supreme moments when even Gandhiji cannot devise a formula, C. R. is called in to invent one. His intellect is so subtle, so refined, so delicate, that one is tempted to ignore his capacities as an administrator, which are considerable," Gunther recorded. President Roosevelt's Personal Representative in India during war time Mr. William Philips had formed a great impression of Rajaji and paid him the courtesy of a visit when the American was having a holiday in South India. In as much as he received the love of the people, he was also the recipient of bitter Press criticisms, even violent personal attacks at times. At Madura, he was showered with a rain of old shoes by a vast audience which he chose to address three years ago. Once when he was hit by a stone at a public meeting, his humour got the better of him. "If we all had such a correct aim we should have got *Swaraj* long ago" he said. An infuriated Hindu Mahasabhite Thatte dealt severe blows on him with an iron bar during the *Simla Talks*. But just a few months afterwards, in the same city of Madura where he was the recipient of shoe-throws from an audience, a vast crowd of 50,000 people wildly cheered him when he paid a visit. One could hardly gauge public opinion on any people's leader with any proper

barometer and the least we could say about it is that, it is not the same at all times and liable to change at any time. As far as Rajaji is concerned, he was the recipient of the good and the bad reactions of it aplenty. All the same, he has richly contributed to the history of our times and is also well assured of a prominent place in our history, yet to be written. Meanwhile, let every Indian re-echo what Premier Attlee recently said to Rajaji in a message.

> "I hope that you will long be spared to lend your wise counsels in the affairs of your country."